

# interzone

NOVEMBER 1999

Number 149

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**'Angel Down, Sussex'**

**Kim Newman**



**ROBERT J. SAWYER interview • PAUL J. McAULEY, PAUL PARK, etc**



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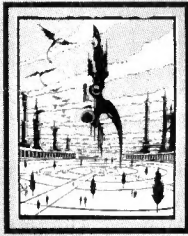
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# interzone

science fiction & fantasy

NOVEMBER 1999

Number 149

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# INTERFACE



The Internet represents the future of all commercial and creative endeavour, the pundits keep telling us. Learn to conduct your business on the World Wide Web, or watch your business wither away. Even the British government has been saying such things of late. Like all publishers in the traditional medium of print-on-paper we are slightly alarmed by such predictions; yet we can take heart from the paradoxical fact that a very large part of the business conducted on the internet so far consists of the buying and selling of books – good old-fashioned print books, and not only new books via large companies like Amazon.com and Bol.com, but rare and second-hand books via increasingly well-organized networks of used-book dealers. (There has never been a better time than right now to find that old book which has been eluding you for years – and to find it at an affordable price.)

*Interzone's* new website, hosted (from the far side of the Atlantic) by the SF Site who also maintain pages for other leading English-language sf-and-fantasy magazines, was launched officially on 1st July 1999. Since then, I'm pleased to say, the number of new subscriptions which we have gained by electronic means, particularly from overseas readers, has risen markedly. It's still too early to say whether this will lead to an overall increase in the size of our subscription base – it may be that many of those new electronic subscriptions are ones we would have received by "snail mail" in any case – but we are hopeful. In another development, *Interzone* has just entered into an agreement with **Bol.com**, an internet subsidiary of one of the world's largest publishers ("Bol" stands for "Books On-Line," or "Bertelsmann On-Line"), to provide information on sf and fantasy for their British-based

website – in return for which Bol.com will, among other things, provide a link to our own website and generally help publicize the magazine.

**Lee Montgomerie**, who recently gave up the Deputy Editorship of *Interzone* to become an advisory editor, deserves all credit for beginning to build this magazine's on-line presence. She created and maintained, for a couple of years, our initial small website. That particular site is no more (replaced by the new, larger and more ambitious [www.sfsite.com/interzone](http://www.sfsite.com/interzone)), but it was valuable as a starting-point and it taught us a number of things. Lee, who has recently gained a new job and been through a number of happy changes in her personal life, will be less actively involved with the magazine from now on, but we remain very grateful for her for all the years of service she has given to *Interzone* both as Deputy Editor and as *de facto* website manager.

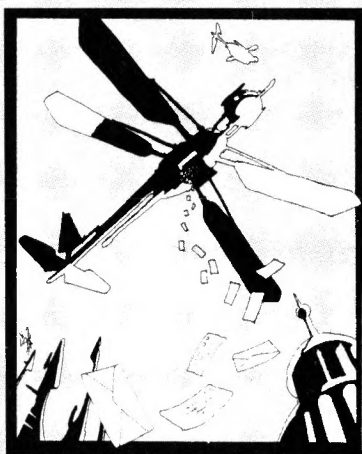
The magazine's new site, like the old one, provides a link to a very full and regularly updated *Interzone* index. If you want to know exactly which story appeared when, which author was interviewed where, or which book or film was reviewed in which issue, with the relevant page numbers, then you can go to [www.sfsite.com/interzone](http://www.sfsite.com/interzone) and click on our index link. (The indices may also be downloaded, for printout or for storage on your computer.) Among the newer features, the website also provides links to the full

texts of a number of stories which appeared in *Interzone* in the past – excellent tales by Sarah Ash, Stephen Baxter, Keith Brooke, Molly Brown, Garry Kilworth, John Meaney, Alastair Reynolds, Nicholas Royle and others – and to an ongoing new movie reference book, unavailable as yet in any other medium, by our regular columnist **Gary Westfahl**. This last, written in entertaining and highly opinionated style, is entitled *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Film* and promises to build into a major resource of information on film-and-TV sf. At present, Gary is adding one new entry per week: if you haven't already checked it out, please do so.

We intend that the new website shall continue to grow, and we welcome suggestions for improvements or additions from our readers. As with the print magazine itself, you may e-mail us your letters of comment direct ([interzone@cix.co.uk](mailto:interzone@cix.co.uk)) or via the link at the website. Subscribers may also e-mail us their change-of-address notifications or any general queries. (The one exception to this electronic openness which we have to insist on, I'm afraid, is that we cannot consider story-submissions sent via e-mail – sheer volume of wordage, and other logistical difficulties, preclude that. So, if you wish to submit, please send "hard copy" only, via regular post, with a self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed.)

Onward to the new Millennium!

**David Pringle**



Dear Editors:

I was provoked by the letters page in *IZ* 147. I thought Richard Calder's "Malignos" (*IZ* 144) was a wonderful story – the setting, the language, and

# INTERACTION

the characters. In fact, I enjoyed it more than any story I've read in *Interzone* for quite some time. It was great, and I'd love to read more in a sequel.

I do, though, reluctantly agree with Simon Robert's assessment of some of the *IZ* art. Not so long ago, a female friend picked up a copy of *Interzone* I had lying around, and sniffed at the spaceship on the cover. "Is this aimed at the adolescent market?" she asked. Quickly I gabbled something about quality fiction, ideas, good writing etc, but she was flicking through the magazine as I spoke and the pages fell open at a drawing of curvaceous young women sticking out bottoms clad (I recall) in tight US flag-decorated shorts. My explanations fell away. Her look indicated – "proves my point." What more could I say?



However, the artwork in number 147 is great – a beautiful mermaid on the cover, bare breasts and all. And the Tanith Lee story is very good.  
**Sarah Singleton**  
sarahsingleton@mostellaria.freemove.co.uk

**Editor:** We shall not be publishing any sequels to Richard Calder's "Maligons." He has since expanded that story into a novel of the same title which is scheduled for publication by Simon & Schuster/Earthlight in May 2000. However, we do have a new, separate and very powerful story by him, coming shortly.

## The Physics of Time Travel

Dear Editors:

Contrary to Gary Westfahl's suggestion ("Pastwonder: The Redemption of Orson Scott Card," *IZ* 144), the notion that time travel would erase the past certainly can't be the product of Card's willingness "to interpret the cold equations in the coldest possible manner." While it's open to debate as to whether this notion leads to morally challenging fiction or just a load of pious self-flagellation, what the cold equations actually do is rule it out entirely.

To be specific, there are just three possibilities compatible with general relativity: (A) time travel can never occur, because the solutions of Einstein's equations that would allow it turn out to violate other aspects of physics; (B) you can travel into your own past, but whatever you do, you certainly won't change anything (Heinlein was fond of this scenario); (C) the nearest thing possible to "travelling into the past" would actually involve entering a different quantum history at a point where it resembles your own past; potentially, the two histories might be indistinguishable at first, but killing the person most like your grandmother would lead to no paradoxes.

If (B) were true, it would be of great psychological interest: since travellers could know before leaving exactly what they'd do on their voyage, it would offer a nice demonstration of the compatibility of free will and determinism. However, a quantum-mechanical treatment of the problem suggests that (C) is far more likely; this is what David Deutsch concluded several years ago. There probably won't be a consensus on this among physicists until there's a testable theory of quantum gravity, but Deutsch's work was based on some fairly general principles that are likely to be a part of any such theory.

So, you might flee from an America where Columbus did bad things, and

you might even stop another version of him repeating the same mistakes elsewhere, but any notion of "erasing" the original events is meaningless. And however noble it might seem to Card for everyone in the original future to commit suicide, that's never going to be an automatic consequence of time travel itself.

**Greg Egan**  
Perth, Western Australia

## The Facts About Verne

Dear Editors:

I read with interest John Clute's criticism (*IZ* 147) of my review of the recent edition of Jules Verne's *Dropped from the Clouds* from Pulp Fictions. I thank him for his interesting comments.

It's regrettable that the inference was made that I assumed the book to have been long-lost. I assumed no such thing – that was the publisher's assumption, or apparently so – but I might as well take it for granted that other people will have seen my words in the same light. Given this, Clute is right to imply that I should have stated the case more clearly. I was keen to use the space instead to mention my enthusiasm for the republications, while giving away a few teasers about the plot. As I pointed out in the same column, the work that Pulp Fictions has recently repackaged (whatever the criteria for selection) is fresher than some of what is purportedly original today. And the publisher's approach means that *IZ* readers who want to look at some of the genre's past may find an easy way of doing so. (I don't know the demographics, but I'm sure *IZ* must have some very young readers.) I think this should be applauded. A title being in print does not necessarily mean that as many people know about it as would be interested in knowing about it.

I stand by my decision not to mention Captain Nemo as I was only reviewing the first of Verne's three parts of *The Mysterious Island*, and Nemo does not make an appearance in *Dropped from the Clouds*.

**David Mathew**  
Dunstable, Bedfordshire  
DDMathew@aol.com

**Editor:** Alas, it seems that Pulp Publications Ltd has failed in its bid to interest a sufficiently wide readership in such old texts. Despite their pre-announced busy schedule, they have issued no new titles since the summer, so it looks as though the two remaining books in the Verne trilogy referred to above will remain in limbo. On the good-news front, however, an increasing number of better-established pub-

lishers, both British and American, are producing "classic" reprints of one sort or another as the century ends – see this issue's "Books Received" for mention of series such as Millenium's "SF Masterworks," Del Rey's "Impact," and the University of Nebraska's Bison Books line. This seems to be a good moment for sf/fantasy reprints.

Dear Editors:

I have to admit to feeling somewhat elated at getting onto your Story-Poll Results list (*Interzone* 145), and slightly depressed at being the last name on it. I've mentioned elsewhere, about something else, though, that I think the system of adding up the positive votes and subtracting the negative is a mistake. It throws up the most and least popular, no question, but the problem lies in the mid-range, where it makes for no distinction whatsoever between those works that provoke a strong reaction – the works that people either love or hate – and those so uninspiring that hardly anybody votes for them in the first place.

The first is patently more worthwhile than the second, and there should be some procedure for reflecting that, either by some additional form of weighing or – better still – simply totting up the good responses and forgetting the bad completely. (I hasten to say that I've no particular axe to grind either way: my own work, at this point, pushes it a bit to be barely publishable, much less strong enough to inspire loathing or adoration.)

**Dave Stone**  
dave@sgloomi.demon.co.uk  
<http://www.sgloomi.demon.co.uk>

Letters for publication should be e-mailed to [interzone@cix.co.uk](mailto:interzone@cix.co.uk) – or sent by conventional post to our editorial address (shown on the contents page). Please note that we reserve the right to shorten letters for reasons of space.

**NEAL STEPHENSON** is signing copies of his cult novel *Cryptonomicon* at Forbidden Planet Bookshop (71 New Oxford Street, London) at 5pm on Tuesday 2nd November 1999.

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# Angel Down, Sussex

*Kim Newman*



### 1: "Too Late in the Year, Surely, for Wasps"

The Reverend Mr Bartholomew Haskins, rector of Angel Down, paused by the open gate of Angel Field. His boots sank a little into the frost-crusted mud. Icewater trickled in his veins. He was momentarily unable to move. From somewhere close by came the unmistakable, horrid buzz of a cloud of insects.

It was too late in the year, surely, for wasps. But his ears were attuned to such sounds. Since childhood, he'd been struck with a horror of insects. Jane, his sister, had died in infancy of an allergic reaction to wasp stings. It was thought likely that he might share her acute sensitivity to their venom, but the reason for his persistent fear – as for so much else in his life – was that it was his stick, poked into a pulpy nest, which had stirred the insects to fury. As a boy, he had prayed to Jane for forgiveness as often as he prayed to Our Lord. As a man, he laboured still under the burden of a guilt beyond assuaging.

"Bart," prompted Sam Farrar, the farmer, "what is it?"

"Nothing," he lied.

At the far end of Angel Field was a copse, four elms growing so close together by a shallow pond their roots and branches were knotted. A flock of sheep were kept here. As Sam hauled his gate shut behind them, Haskins noticed the sheep forming a clump, as if eager to gather around their owner. There were white humps in the rest of the field, nearer the copse. They didn't move. Wasps did swarm over them.

Hideous, dreadful creatures.

Haskins forced himself to venture into Angel Field, following the farmer. He kept his arms stiffly by his side and walked straight-legged, wary of exciting a stray monster into sudden, furious hostility.

"Never seen anything like this, Bart," said Sam. "In 50 year on the land."

The farmer waded through his flock and knelt by one of the humps, waving the wasps away with a casual,



Illustrations by Dominic Harman



ungloved hand. The scene swam before Haskins's eyes. A filthy insect crawled on Sam's hand and Haskins's stomach knotted with panic.

He overcame his dread with a supreme effort and joined his friend. The hump was a dead sheep. Sam picked up the animal's woolly head and turned its face to the sunlight.

The animal had been savagely mutilated. Its skull was exposed on one side. The upper lip, cheek and one side of the nose were torn away as if by shrapnel.

"I think it's been done with acid."

"Should you be touching it, then?"

"Good point."

Sam dropped the beast's head. The seams in his face deepened as he frowned.

"The others are the same. Strange swirls etched into their hides. Look."

There were rune-like patches on the dead sheep. They might have been left by a weapon or branding iron. The skin and flesh was stripped off or eaten away.

"My Dad'd never keep beasts in Angel Field. Not after the trouble with my Aunt Rose. That was in '72, afore I was born. You know that story, of course. Was kept from me for a long time. This is where it happened."

The wasps had come back. Haskins couldn't think.

"Always been something off about Angel Field. Were standing stones here once, like at Stonehenge but smaller. After Rose, Grandad had 'em all pulled down and smashed to bits. There was a fuss and a protest, but it's Farrar land. Nothing busybodies from Up London could do about it."

Grassy depressions, in a circle, showed where the stones had stood for thousands of years. The dead sheep were within the area that had once been bounded by the ring.

It seemed to Haskins that the insects were all inside the circle too, gathering. Not just wasps, but flies, bees, hornets, ants, beetles. Wings sawed the air, so swiftly they blurred. Mouth-parts stitched, stingers dripped, feelers whipped, legs scissored. A chitinous cacophony.

Bartholomew Haskins was terrified, and ashamed of his fear. Soon, Sam would notice. But at the moment, the farmer was too puzzled and annoyed by what had befallen his sheep.

"I tell you, Bart, I don't know whether to call the vet or the constable."

"This isn't natural," Haskins said. "Someone did this."

"Hard to picture, Bart. But I think you're right."

Sam stood up and looked away, at his surviving sheep. None bore any unusual mark, or seemed ailing. But they were spooked. It was in their infrequent bleating. If even the sheep felt it, there must be something here.

Haskins looked about, gauging the positions of the missing stones. The dead sheep were arranged in a smaller circle within the larger, spaced nearly evenly. And at the centre was another bundle, humped differently.

"What's this, Sam?"

The farmer came over.

"Not one of mine," he said.

The bundle was under a hide of some sort. Insects clung to it like a ghastly shroud. They moved, as if the thing were alive. Haskins struggled to keep his gorge down.

The hide undulated and a great cloud of wasps rose into the air in a spiral. Haskins swallowed a scream.

"It's moving."

The hide flipped back at the edge and a small hand groped out.

"Good God," Sam swore.

Haskins knelt down and tore away the hide. It proved to be a tartan blanket, crusted with mud and glittering with shed bug scales.

Large, shining eyes caught the sun like a cat's. The creature gave out a keening shriek that scraped nerves. There was something of the insect in the screech, and something human. For a moment, Haskins thought he was hearing Jane again, in her dying agony.

The creature was a muddy child. A little girl, of perhaps eight. She was curled up like a buried mummy, and brown all over, clothes as much as her face and limbs. Her feet were bare, and her hair was drawn back with a silvery ribbon.

She blinked in the light, still screeching.

Haskins patted the girl, trying to soothe her. She hissed at him, showing bright, sharp, white teeth. He didn't recognize her, but there was something familiar in her face, in the set of her eyes and the shape of her mouth.

She hesitated, like a snake about to strike, then clung to him, sharp fingers latched onto his coat, face pressed to his chest. Her screech was muffled, but continued.

Haskins looked over the girl's shoulder at Sam Farrar. He was bewildered and a-goggle. In his face, Haskins saw an echo of the girl's features, even her astonished expression.

It couldn't be...

...but it was. Missing for over 50 years and returned exactly as she had been when taken.

This was Rose Farrar.

## **2: "Beyond the Veil"**

"There is one who would speak with you, Catriona Kaye," intoned Mademoiselle Astarte. "One who has passed beyond the veil, one who cares for you very much."

Catriona nodded curtly. The medium's lacquered fingers bit deeply into her hand. She could smell peppermint on the woman's breath, and gin.

Mademoiselle Astarte wore a black dress, shimmering with beaded fringes. A tiara of peacock feathers gave her the look of an Aztec priestess. A rope of pearls hung flat against her chest and dangled to her navel. As table-rappers went, she was the bee's roller-skates.

She shook her head slightly, eyes shut in concentration. Catriona's hand really hurt now.

"A soldier," the medium breathed.

The Great War had been done with for seven years. It was a fair bet that anyone of Catriona's age – she was a century baby, born 1900 – consulting a woman in Mademoiselle Astarte's profession would be interested in a soldier. Almost everyone had lost a soldier – a sweetheart, a brother, even a father.



She nodded, noncommittally.

"Yes, a soldier," the medium confirmed. A lone tear ran neatly through her mascara.

There were others in the room. Mademoiselle didn't have her clients sit about a table. She arranged them on stiff-backed chairs in a rough semi-circle and wandered theatrically among them, seizing with both hands the person to whom the spirit or spirits who spoke through her wished to address themselves.

Everyone was attentive. The medium put on a good show.

Mademoiselle Astarte's mother, a barrel-shaped lady draped in what might once have been a peculiarly ugly set of mid-Victorian curtains, let her fingers play over the keys of an upright piano, tinkling notes at random. It was supposed to suggest the music of the spheres, and put the spirits at ease. Catriona was sure the woman was playing "Knocked 'Em in the Old Kent Road" very slowly.

Smoke filtered into the room. Not scented like incense, but pleasantly woody. It seemed to come from nowhere. The electric lamps were dimmed with Chinese scarves. A grey haze gathered over the carpet, rising like a tide.

"His passing was sudden," the medium continued. "But not painful. A shock. He hardly knew what had happened to him, was unaware of his condition."

Also calculated: no upsetting details – choking on gas while gutted on barbed wire, mind smashed by months of bombardment and shot as a coward – and a subtle explanation for why it had taken years for the spirit to come through.

There was a fresh light. It seemed sourceless, but the smoke glowed from within as it gathered into a spiral. A prominent china manufacturer gasped, while his wife's face was wrung with a mix of envy and joy – they had lost a son at Passchendaele.

A figure was forming. A man in uniform, olive drab bleached grey. The cap was distinct, but the face was a blur. Any rank insignia were unreadable.

Catriona's hands were almost bloodless. She had to steel herself to keep from yelping. Mademoiselle Astarte yanked her out of her chair and held tight.

The figure wavered in the smoke.

"He wants you to know..."

"...that he cares for me very much?"

"Yes. Indeed. It is so."

Mademoiselle Astarte's rates were fixed. Five pounds for a session. Those whose loved ones "made contact" were invariably stirred enough to double or triple the fee. The departed never seemed overly keen on communicating with those left behind who happened to be short of money.

Catriona peered at the wavering smoke soldier.

"There's something I don't understand," she said.

"Yes, child..."

Mademoiselle Astarte could only be a year or two older than her.

"My soldier. Edwin."

"Yes. Edwin. That is the name. I hear it clearly."

A smile twitched on Catriona's lips.

"Edwin... isn't... actually *dead*."

The medium froze. Her nails dug into Catriona's bare arms. Her face was a study in silent fury. Catriona detached Mademoiselle Astarte's hands from her person and stood back.

"The music is to cover the noise of the projection equipment, isn't it?"

Mademoiselle's mother banged the keyboard without interruption. Catriona looked up at the ceiling. The chandelier was an arrangement of mirror pendants clustered around a pinhole aperture.

"There's another one of you in the room upstairs. Cranking the projector. Your father, I would guess. It's remarkable how much more reliable your connection with the spirit world has become since his release from Pentonville."

She poked her hand into the smoke and wiggled her fingers. Greatcoat buttons were projected onto her hand. The sepia tint was a nice touch.

"You bitch," Mademoiselle Astarte spat, like a fishwife.

The others in the circle were shocked.

"I really must protest," began the china manufacturer. His bewildered wife shook her head, still desperate to believe.

"I'm afraid this woman has been rooking you," Catriona announced. "She is a clever theatrical performer, and a rather nasty specimen of that unlovely species, the confidence trickster."

The medium's hands leaped like hawks. Catriona caught her wrists and held the dagger-nails away from her face. Her fringes writhed like the fronds of an angry jellyfish.

"You are a disgrace, Mademoiselle," she said, coldly. "And your sham is blown. You would do well to return to the music-halls, where your prestidigitation does no harm."

She withdrew tactfully from the room. A commotion erupted within, as sitters clamoured for their money back, and Mademoiselle and her mother tried in vain to calm them. The china manufacturer, extremely irate, mentioned the name of a famous firm of solicitors.

In the hallway, Catriona found her good cloth coat and slipped it on over a moderately fringed white dress. It was daringly cut just above the knee, barely covering the rolled tops of her silk stockings. She fixed a cloche hat over her bobbed brown hair, catching sight of her slightly too satisfied little face in the hall mirror. She still had freckles, which made the carefully placed beauty mark a superfluous black dot. Her mouth was nice, though, just the shape for a rich red cupid's bow. She blew a triumphant kiss at herself, and stepped out onto Phene Street.

Her cold anger was subsiding. Charlatanry always infuriated her, especially when combined with cupidity. The field of psychical research would never be taken seriously while the flim-flam merchants were in business, fleecing the grieving and the gullible.

Edwin Winthrop awaited her outside, the Bentley idling at the kerb like a green and brass land-yacht. He sat at the wheel, white scarf flung over his shoulder, a large check cap over his patent-leather hair, warmed not by a voluminous car coat but by a leather

flying jacket. The ends of his moustache were almost unnoticeably waxed, and he grinned to see her, satisfied that she had done well at the seance. Her soldier was seven years out of uniform, but still obscurely in the service of his country.

"Hop in, Catty-Kit," he said. "You'll want to make a swift get-away, I suspect. Doubtless, the doers of dastardly deeds will have their fur standing on end by now, and be looking to exact a cowardly revenge upon your pretty little person."

A heavy plant-pot fell from the skies and exploded on the pavement a foot away from her white pumps. It spread shrapnel of well-watered dirt and waxy aspidistra leaves. She glanced up at the town house, noticing the irate old man in an open window, and vaulted into the passenger seat.

"Very neatly done, Cat," Edwin complimented her.

The car swept away, roaring like a jungle beast. Fearful curses followed. She blushed to hear such language. Edwin sounded the bulb-horn in reply.

She leaned close and kissed his chilled cheek.

"How's the spirit world, my angel?" she asked.

"How would I know?" he shrugged.

"I have it on very good authority that you've taken up residence there."

"Not yet, old thing. The Hun couldn't get shot of me on the ground or in the air during the late unpleasantness, and seven stripes of foul fellow have missed their chance since the cessation. Edwin Winthrop, Esquire, of Somerset and Bloomsbury, is pretty much determined to stick about on this physical plane for the foreseeable. After all, it's so deuced interesting a sphere. With you about, one wouldn't wish to say farewell to the corporeal just yet."

They drove through Chelsea, towards St James's Park. It was a bright English autumn day, with red leaves in the street and a cleansing nip in the air.

"What do you make of this?"

One hand on the wheel, he produced a paper from inside his jacket. It was a telegram.

"It's from the Old Man," he explained.

The message was terse, three words. Angel Down Sussex.

"Is it an event or a place?" she asked.

Edwin laughed, even teeth shining.

"A bit of both, Catty-Kit. A bit of both."

### 3: "In the Strangers Room"

Strictly speaking, the gentle sex were not permitted within the portals of the Diogenes Club. When this was first brought to Winthrop's attention, he had declared his beloved associate to be not a woman but a minx and therefore not subject to the regulation. The Old Man, never unduly deferential to hoary tradition, accepted this and Catriona Kaye was now admitted without question to the Strangers Room. As she breezed into the discreet building in Pall Mall and sat herself daintily down like a deceptively well-behaved schoolgirl, Winthrop derived petty satisfaction from the contained explosions of fury that emanated from behind several raised numbers of *The Times*. He realized that the Old Man shared this tiny pleasure.

Though he had served with the Somerset Light Infantry and the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War, Edwin Winthrop had always been primarily responsible to the Diogenes Club, least-known and most eccentric instrument of the British Government. If anything, peace had meant an increase in his activities on their behalf. The Old Man – Charles Beauregard, Chairman of the Club's Ruling Cabal – had formed a section to look into certain matters no other official body could be seen to take seriously. Winthrop was the leading agent of that special section, and Catriona Kaye, highly unofficially, his most useful aide. Her interest in psychical research, a subject upon which she had written several books, dovetailed usefully with the section's remit, to deal with the apparently inexplicable.

The Old Man joined them in the Strangers Room, signalled an attendant to bring brandy and sat himself down on an upholstered sofa. At 72, his luxurious hair and clipped moustache were snow white but his face was marvellously unlined and his eyes still bright. Beauregard had served with the Diogenes Club for over 40 years, since the days when the much-missed Mycroft Holmes chaired the Cabal and the Empire was ceaselessly harried by foreign agents after naval plans.

Beauregard complimented Catriona on her complexion; she smiled and showed her dimple. There was a satirical undercurrent to this exchange, as if all present had to pretend always to be considerably less clever than they were, but were also compelled to communicate on a higher level their genuine acuties. This meant sometimes seeming to take the roles of windy old uncle and winsome young flirt.

"You're our authority on the supernatural, Catriona," said the Old Man, enunciating all four syllables of the name. "Does Angel Down mean anything to you?"

"I know of the story," she replied. "It was a nine-day wonder, like the *Mary Celeste* or the Angel of Mons. There's a quite bad Victorian book on the affair, Mrs Twemlow's *The Girl Who Went With the Angels*."

"Yes, our little vanished Rosie Farrar."

Until today, Winthrop had never heard of Angel Down, Sussex.

"There was a wave of 'angelic visitations' in the vicinity of Angel Down in the 1870s," Catriona continued, showing off rather fetchingly. "Flying chariots made of stars harnessed together, whooshing through the tree-tops, leaving burned circles in fields where they touched ground. Dr Martin Hesselius, the distinguished specialist in supernatural affairs, was consulted by the Farrar family and put the business down to a plague of fire elementals. More recently, in an article, Dr Silence, another important researcher in the field, has invoked the Canadian wendigo or wind-walker as an explanation. But in the popular imagination, the visitors have always been angels, though not perhaps the breed we are familiar with from the Bible and Mr Milton. The place name suggests that this rash of events was not unprecedented in the area. Mrs Twemlow unearthed medieval references to miraculous sightings. The visitations revolved around a neolithic circle."



"And what about the little girl?" Winthrop asked.

"This Rosie Farrar, daughter of a farmer, claimed to have talked with the occupants of these chariots of fire. They were cherubs, she said, about her height, clad in silvery-grey raiment, with large black eyes and no noses to speak of. She was quite a prodigy. One day, she went into Angel Field, where the stones stood, and was transported up into the sky, in the presence of witnesses, and spirited away in a fiery wheel."

"Never to be seen again?" Winthrop ventured.

"Until yesterday," the Old Man answered. "Rose has come back. Or, rather, a child looking exactly as Rose did 50 years ago has come back. In Angel Field."

"She'd be an old woman by now," Winthrop said.

"Providing time passes as we understand it in the Realm of the Angels," said Catriona.

"And where exactly might that be, Cat?"

She poked her tongue out at him, just as the attendant, a fierce-looking ghurka, returned with their brandy. He betrayed no opinion, but she was slightly cowed. Serve her right.

"The local rector made the report. One Bartholomew Haskins. He called the Lord Lieutenant, and the matter was passed on to the Diogenes Club. Now, I'm entrusting it to you."

"What does this girl have to say for herself?" Catriona asked. "Does she actually claim to be Rosie Farrar?"

"She hasn't said anything yet. Photographs exist of the real Rose, and our girl is said to resemble them uncannily."

"Uncannily, eh?" said Winthrop.

"Just so."

"I should think this'll make for a jolly weekend away from town," Winthrop told the Old Man. "Angel Down is near enough to Falmer Field for me to combine an investigation with a couple of sorties in *Katie*."

Winthrop had kept up his flying since the War, maintaining his own aeroplane, a modified Camel fighter named *Katie*. She was getting to be a bit of an antique paraded next to the latest line in gleaming metal monoplanes, but he trusted her as much as he did Catriona or the Bentley. He knew the kite's moods and foibles, and could depend on her in a pinch. If she could come through the best efforts of the late Baron von Richthofen's Flying Circus, she could survive any peace-time scrape. If he were to tangle with "chariots of stars," he might have need of the faithful *Katie*.

Catriona was thoughtful. As ever, she saw this less as a jaunt than he did. He needed her to balance him. She had a strong sense of what was significant, and kept him from haring off on wild streaks when he needed to be exercising the old brain-box.

"Has this miraculous reappearance been made public?"

The Old Man's brows knit. "I'm afraid so. The Brighton *Argus* carried the story this morning, and the afternoon editions of all the dailies have it, in various lights. Haskins knows enough to keep the child away from the press for the moment. But all manner of people are likely to take an interest. You know who I mean. It would be highly convenient if you could come up with some unsensational explanation that will set-

tle the matter before it goes any further."

Winthrop understood. It was almost certain this business was a misunderstanding or a hoax. If so, it was best it were blown up at once. And, if not, it was sadly best that it be thought so.

"I'll see what I can do, Beauregard."

"Good man. Now, you children run off and play. And don't come back until you know what little Rosie is up to."

#### 4: "A Demure Little Thing"

With Sam Farrar queerly reluctant to take his miraculously returned aunt into his house, Haskins had to put the little girl up at the rectory. He wondered, chiding himself for a lack of charity, whether Sam's hesitation was down to the question of the stake in Farrar Farm, if any, to which Rose might be entitled. It was also true that for Sam and Ellen to be presented in late middle age with a child they might be expected to raise as their own would be an upheaval in their settled lives.

The girl had said nothing yet, but sat quietly in an oversized chair in his study, huddled inside one of Haskins's old dressing gowns. Mrs Cully, his housekeeper, had got the poor child out of her filthy clothes and given her a bath. She had wanted to throw away the ruined garments, but Haskins insisted they be kept for expert examination. Much would hinge on those dirty rags. If it could be proven that they were of more recent provenance than 1872, then this was not Rose Farrar.

Haskins sat at his desk, unable to think of his sermon. His glance was continually drawn to the girl. Now she had stopped keening, she seemed a demure little thing. She sat with one leg tucked up under her and the other a-dangle, showing a dainty, uncalloused foot. With her face scrubbed and her hair clean – she insisted on having her silver ribbon back – she could have been any well-brought-up child waiting for a story before being packed off to bed.

Telegrams had arrived all morning. And the telephone on his desk had rung more often than in the past six months. He was to expect a pair of investigators from London. Representatives from Lord Northcliffe's *Mail* and Lord Beaverbrook's *Express* had made competing overtures to secure the "rights" to the story. Many others had shown an interest, from charitable bodies concerned with the welfare of "a unique orphan" to commercial firms who wished "the miracle girl" to endorse their soap or tonic. Haskins understood the girl must be shielded from such public scrutiny, at least until the investigators had assessed her case.

One telegram in particular stirred Haskins. A distinguished person offered Rose any service it was within his power to perform. Haskins had replied swiftly, inviting the author-knight to Angel Down. If anyone could get to the bottom of the matter, it would be the literary lion whose sharpness of mind was reputed to be on a par with that of the detective he had made famous and who had worked so tirelessly in his later years to demonstrate the possibility of the miraculous here on Earth.

The girl seemed unaware of Haskins's fascination with her. She was a Victorian parent's idea of perfec-

tion – pretty as a picture, quiet as a mouse, poised as a waxwork. Haskins wondered about the resemblance to Sam Farrar. It had seemed so strong in the first light of discovery but was now hard to see.

He got up from his desk, abandoning his much-begun and little-developed sermon, and knelt before the child. He took her small hands, feeling bird-like bones and fragile warmth. This was a real girl, not an apparition. She had been vigorously bathed and spent the night in the guest bedroom. Ghosts did not leave dirty bathwater or crumpled sheets. She had consumed some soup last night and half an apple for breakfast.

Her eyes fixed his and he wanted to ask her questions.

Since she had stopped making her peculiar noise, she had uttered no sound. She seemed to understand what was said to her but was disinclined to answer. She did not even respond to attempted communication via rudimentary sign language or Mrs Cully's baby-talk.

"Rose?" he asked.

There was no flicker in her eyes.

Sam had produced pictures, yellowed poses of the Farrar children from the dawn of photography. One among a frozen gaggle of girls resembled exactly this child. Sam reluctantly confirmed the child in the portrait as his vanished Aunt Rose, the Little Girl Who Went With the Angels.

"What happened to you, Rose?"

According to the stories, she had been swept up to the Heavens in a column of starlight.

Haskins heard a buzzing. There was a wasp in the room!

He held the girl's hands too tightly. Her face contorted in pain. He let go and made an attempt to soothe her, to prevent the return of her screeches.

Her mouth opened, but nothing came out.

The wasp was still here. Haskins was horribly aware of it. His collar was damp and his stomach shifted.

There was more than one.

The buzzing grew louder. Haskins stood up and looked about for the evil black-and-yellow specks.

He looked again at Rose, suddenly afraid for her. The girl's face shifted and she was his sister, Jane.

It was like an injection of wasp venom to the heart.

Her mouth was a round aperture, black inside. The wasp shrill was coming from her.

Haskins was terrified, dragged back to his boyhood, stripped of adult dignities and achievements, confronted with his long-dead victim.

He remembered vividly the worst thing he had ever done. The stick sinking into the nest. His cruel laughter as the cloud swarmed from the sundered ovoid and took flight, whipped away by strong wind.

Jane stood on the chair, dressing gown a heavy monk's robe. She still wore her silver ribbon. She wasn't *exactly* Jane. There was some Rose in her eyes. And a great deal of darkness, of something else.

She reached out to him as if for a cuddle. He fell to his knees, this time in prayer. He tried to close his eyes.

The girl's mouth was huge, a gaping circle. Black apparatus emerged, a needle-tipped proboscis rimmed with whipping feelers. It was an insectile appendage,

intricate and hostile, parts grinding together with wicked purpose.

Her eyes were black poached eggs overflowing their sockets, a million facets glinting.

The proboscis touched his throat. A barb of ice pierced his skin. Shock stopped his heart and stilled his lungs, leaving his mind to flutter on for eternal seconds.

## 5: "A Funny Turn"

Angel Down Rectory was a nice little cottage close by the church, rather like the home Catriona had grown up in. Her kindly father was a clergyman in Somerset, in the village where Edwin's distant father had owned the Manor House without really being Lord of the Manor.

Colonel Winthrop had been literally distant for most of his later life, stationed in India or the Far East after some scandal which was never spoken of in the village. An alienist might put that down as the root of a streak of slyness, of manipulative ruthlessness, that fitted his son for the murkier aspects of his business. Recognizing this dark face, fed with blood in the trenches and the skies, as being as much a part of Edwin's personality as his humour, generosity and belief in her, Catriona did her best to shine her light upon it, to keep him fixed on a human scale. The Reverend Kaye mildly disapproved of her spook-chasing and changed the subject whenever anyone asked about his daughter's marriage plans, but was otherwise as stalwart, loyal and loving a parent as she could wish.

They had found the village with ease, homing in on a steeple visible from a considerable distance across the downs. For such a small place, Angel Down was blessed with a large and impressive church, which was in itself suggestive. If a site can boast an ancient stone circle and a long-established Christian church, it is liable to have been a centre of unusual spiritual activity for quite some time.

There was something wrong. She knew it at once. She made no claim to psychic powers, but had learned to be sensitive. She could almost always distinguish between an authentic spectre and a fool in a bedsheet, no matter how much fog and shadow were about. It was a question of reading the tiniest signs, often on an unconscious level.

"Careful, dearest," she told Edwin, as they got out of the car.

He looked at her quizzically. She couldn't explain her unsettling feeling, but he had been with her in enough bizarre situations to accept her shrug of doubt as a trustworthy sign of danger ahead. He thrust a hand into his coat pocket, taking hold of the revolver he carried when about the business of the Diogenes Club.

She heard something. A sound like an insect, but then again not. It was not within her experience.

Edwin rapped on the door with his knuckles.

A round pink woman let them in. Upon receipt of Edwin's card, the housekeeper – Mrs Cully – told them they were expected and that she would tell the rector of their arrival.

The narrow hallway was likeably cluttered. A stand was overburdened with coats and hats, boots lined up



for inspection nearby, umbrellas and sticks ready for selection. A long-case clock ticked slow, steady seconds.

There was no evidence of eccentricity.

Mrs Cully returned, pink gone to grey. Catriona was immediately alert, nerves singing like wires. The woman couldn't speak, but nodded behind her, to the rector's study.

With his revolver, Edwin pushed open the door.

Catriona saw a black-faced man lying on the carpet, eyes staring. His hands were white.

Edwin stepped into the room and Catriona followed. They both knelt by the prone man. He had a shock of red-grey hair and wore a clerical collar, taut as a noose around his swollen throat.

The Reverend Mr Haskins – for this could be none other – was freshly dead. Still warm, he had no pulse, heartbeat or breath. His face was swollen and coal-coloured. His mouth and eyes were fixed open. Even his tongue was black and stiff. Drop-lets of blood clung to his hard, overripe cheeks.

"Snakebite?" she asked, shuddering.

"Could be, Cat," he said, standing up.

She was momentarily troubled. Did she hear the soft slither of a dire reptile winding across the carpet? She was not fond of the beasts. A criminal mandarin-sorcerer had once tried to murder Edwin with a black mamba delivered in a Harrod's hamper. She had been unfortunate enough to be sharing a punt with him when the scheme came to hissing light. She had cause to remember that snakes can swim.

"And who have we here?" he asked.

She stood. Edwin had found the girl, sat calmly in an armchair, wearing a man's large dressing gown, leafing through a picture book of wild flowers. The supposed Rose Farrar was a tiny thing, too sharp-featured to be considered pretty but with a striking, triangular face and huge, curious eyes. Her expression was familiar to Catriona. She had seen it on shell-shocked soldiers coming home from a war that would always be fought in their minds.

She wanted to warn Edwin against touching the girl.

But that would have been ridiculous.

"Little miss, what happened?" he asked.

The girl looked up from her book. For a moment, she seemed like a shrunk adult. The real Rosie would be almost 60, Catriona remembered.

"He had a funny turn," the child said.

That much was obvious.

"Do you have a name, child?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, disinclined to reveal more.

"And what might it be?" she asked.

The little girl turned to look at her, for the first time, and said, "Catriona."

It was a tiny shock.

"I am Catriona," Catriona said. "And this is Edwin. You are...?"

She held up her book. On the page was a picture of a wild rose, delicate green water-colour leaves with incarnadine petal splashes.

"Rose," the girl said.

This was considerably more serious than a hoax. A man was dead. No longer just a puzzle to be unpicked and forgotten, this was a mystery to be solved.

A panicked cough from the doorway drew their attention. It was Mrs Cully, eyes fixed on the ceiling, away from the corpse.

"There's another come visiting," she said.

Catriona knew they must have been racing newspapermen to get here. There would be reporters all over the village, and soon – when this latest development was out – front-page headlines in all the papers.

"Is it someone from the press?" Edwin asked.

The woman shook her head. A big, elderly man gently stepped around her and into the room. He had a large, bushy moustache and kindly eyes. She knew him at once.

"Sir Arthur," said Edwin, "welcome to Angel Down. I wish the circumstances of our meeting had been different."

## 6: "Venomous Lightning"

Winthrop shifted his revolver to his left hand, so he could extend his right arm and shake hands with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The author was in his mid-60s,



but his grip was firm. He was an outdoor-looking man, more Watson than Holmes.

"You have me at a disadvantage, sir."

"I am Edwin Winthrop, of the Diogenes Club."

"Oh," said Sir Arthur, momentarily, "*them*."

"Yes, indeed. Water under the bridge, and all that."

Sir Arthur rumbled. He had clearly not forgotten that the Diogenes Club had once taken such a dim view of his mentioning their name in two pieces placed in the *Strand* magazine that considerable pressure had been brought to ensure the suppression of further such narratives. While the consulting detective was always slyly pleased that his feats be publicized, his civil servant brother – Beauregard's predecessor – preferred to hide his considerable light under a bushel. Sir Arthur had never revealed the exact nature of the Club and Mycroft's position within it, but he had drawn attention to a man and an institution who would far rather their names were unknown to the general public. No real lasting harm was done, though the leagues who followed Sherlock Holmes were tragically deprived of thrilling accounts of several memorable occasions upon which he had acted as an instrument of his older brother and his country.

"And this is Miss Catriona Kaye," Winthrop continued.

"I know who she is."

The sentence was like a slap, but Catriona did not flinch at it.

"This woman," Sir Arthur said, "has made it her business to harass those few unselfish souls who can offer humanity the solace it so badly needs. I've had a full account of her unwarranted attack this morning on Mademoiselle Astarte of Chelsea."

Winthrop remembered Sir Arthur was a committed, not to say credulous, Spiritualist.

"Sir Arthur," said Catriona, fixing his steely gaze, "Mademoiselle Astarte is a cruel hoaxer and an extortionist. She does your cause – nay, *our* cause – no credit whatsoever. I too seek only light in the darkness. I should have thought, given your well-known association with the most brilliant deductive mind of the age, you would see my activities as a necessary adjunct to your own."

She had him there. Sir Arthur was uncomfortable, but too honest a man not to admit Catriona was right. In recent years, he had been several times duped by the extraordinary claims of hoaxers. There was that business with the fairies. He looked around the room, avoiding Catriona's sharp eyes. He saw the body of Mr Haskins. And the girl curled up in the chair.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed.

"This is exactly the scene we found," Winthrop said.

"I heard a noise earlier, as we arrived," Catriona revealed. "Something like an insect."

"It seems as if a whole hive of bees has stung him."

Sir Arthur had trained as a doctor, Winthrop remembered.

"Could it have been poison?" he asked.

"If so, someone's tidied up," Sir Arthur said, confidently turning the swollen head from side to side. "No cup or glass with spilled liquid. No half-eaten cake. No dart stuck in the flesh. The face and chest are swollen but not

the hands or, I'll wager, the feet. I'd say whatever struck him did so through this wound here, in the throat."

A florin-sized red hole showed in the greasy black skin.

"It is as if he were struck by venomous lightning."

Sir Arthur found an orange blanket in a basket by the sofa and spread it over the dead man. The twisted shape was even more ghastly when shrouded.

"The girl says he had a 'funny turn'," Winthrop said.

For the first time, Sir Arthur considered the child.

"Is this Rose? Has she spoken?"

The girl said nothing. She was interested in her book again. At her age, she could hardly be expected to be much concerned with grown-up things.

If she was the age she seemed.

Sir Arthur went over to the chair and examined the girl. His hands, steady as a rock when patting down a gruesome corpse, trembled as they neared her hair. He touched fingertips to the silver ribbon that held back her curls, and drew them away as if shocked.

"Child, child," he said, tears in his eyes, "what wonders have you seen? What hope can you give us?"

This was not the dispassionate, scientific interrogation Winthrop had planned. He was touched by the old man's naked emotion. Sir Arthur had lost a son in the War, and thereafter turned to Spiritualism for comfort. He betrayed a palpable need for confirmation of his beliefs. Like the detective he had made famous, he needed evidence.

The possible Rose was like a child queen regarding an aged and loyal knight with imperious disdain. Sir Arthur literally knelt at her feet, looking up to her.

"Do you know about the Little People?" she asked.

## 7: "A Gift From Faerie"

Catriona had been given to understand that Rose did not speak, but she was becoming quite chatty. Sir Arthur quizzed her about "the Little People," who were beginning to sound more like fairies than cherubs. She wondered if Rose were not one of those children who cut her personality to suit the adult or adults she was with, mischievous with one uncle, modest with the next. The girl was constantly clever, she felt, but otherwise completely mercurial.

It was only a few years since the name of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a watchword for good sense to most of Great Britain, had been devalued by the affair of the Cottingley Fairies. Two little girls, not much older than this child, had not only claimed to be in regular communion with the wee folk but produced photographs of them – subsequently shown to be amateur forgeries – which Sir Arthur rashly endorsed as genuine, even to the extent of writing *The Coming of the Fairies*, an inspirational book about the case. Though the hoax had been exploded a dozen times, Sir Arthur stubbornly refused to disbelieve. Catriona sensed the old man's need for faith, his devout wish for the magical to penetrate his world and declare itself irrefutably.

"I went away with them," the girl told them. "The Little People. I was in their home in the sky. It's inside of a cloud, and like a hollow tree, with criss-cross roots and branches. We could all fly there, or float. There



was no up or down. They played with me for ever such a long time. And gave me my ribbon."

She turned her head, showing the ribbon in her hair. Catriona had noticed it before.

"Rose, may I see your ribbon?" Sir Arthur asked.

Catriona wasn't comfortable with this. Surely something should be done for poor Mr Haskins before the girl was exhaustively interviewed.

Rose took the ribbon out of her hair solemnly and offered it to Sir Arthur.

"Extraordinary," he said, running it through his fingers. He offered it to Catriona.

She hesitated a moment and accepted the thing.

It was not any fabric she knew. Predominantly silvery, it was imprinted with green shapes, like runes or diagrams. Though warm to the touch, it might be a new type of processed metal. She crumpled the ribbon into a ball, then opened her fist. The thing sprang back into its original shape without a crease.

"You're bleeding," Edwin said.

The edges were sharp as pampas grass. Without feeling it, she had shallowly grazed herself.

"May I have it again now?" Rose asked.

Catriona returned the ribbon, which the girl carefully wound into her hair. She did not knot it, but *shaped* it, into a coil which held back her curls.

"A gift from faerie," Sir Arthur mused.

Catriona wasn't sure. Her hand was began to sting. She took a hankie from her reticule and stemmed the trickle of blood from the scratch.

"Rose, my dear," said Sir Arthur. "It is now 1925. What year was it when you went away, to play with the Little People? Was it a long time ago? As long ago, ahem, as 1872?"

The girl didn't answer. Her face darkened, as if she were suddenly afraid or unable to do a complicated sum in mental arithmetic.

"Let's play a game?" Edwin suggested, genially. "What's this?"

He held up a pencil from the rector's desk.

"Pencil," Rose said, delighted.

"Quite right. And this?"

The letter-opener.

"A thin knife."

"Very good, Rose. And this?"

He picked the telephone receiver up from its cradle.

"Telly Phone," the girl said.

Edwin set the receiver down and nodded in muted triumph.

"Alexander Graham Bell," he said, almost sadly. "1876."

"She's been back two days, man," Sir Arthur said, annoyed. He turned to the girl and tried to smile reassuringly. "Did the rector tell you about the telephone? Did you hear it make a ring-ring noise, see him talk to friends a long way away with it?"

Rose was guarded now. She knew she had been caught out.

If this was a hoax, it was not a simple one. That ribbon was outside nature. And Haskins had died by means unknown.

"Why don't you use that instrument to summon the police?" said Sir Arthur, nodding at the telephone.

"Call the police?" Edwin said. "Tut-tut, what would Mr Holmes say? This matter displays unusual features which the worthy Sussex constabulary will not be best equipped to deal with."

"This man should at least have a doctor look at him."

"He has had one, Sir Arthur. You."

The author-knight was not happy. And neither was she.

## 8: "A Changeling"

Winthrop was satisfied that this girl was not the real Rose, and that an imposture was being planned – perhaps as part of a scheme to dupe the farmer, Sam Farrar, out of his property. The Reverend Mr Haskins must have stumbled onto the trick and been done nastily to death. From the look of the rector's throat, something like a poison-tipped spear had been used on him. It remained for the girl to be persuaded to identify the conspirators who had tutored her in imposture. She was too young to be guilty by herself.

"Now, missy, let's talk about this game you've been playing," he said. "The dress-up-and-pretend game. Who taught it to you?"

The girl's face was shut. He thought she might try crying. But she was too tough for that. She was like any adult criminal, exposed and sullen, refusing to co-operate, unaffected by remorse.

"It's not that simple, Edwin," Catriona said. "The ribbon."

Winthrop had thought of that. Lightweight metallized fabrics were being used in aircraft manufacture these days, and that scrap might well be an offcut. It was a strange touch, though.

"There's something else. Look at her."

He did. She had an ordinary face. There was something about the eyes, though. A violet highlight.

"There are Little People," she said. "There are, there are. They are bald, and have eyes like saucers, and no noses. They played with me. For a long time. And they have friends here, on the ground. Undertakers with smoked glasses."

"What is your name?"

"Rose," she said, firmly.

Was she trying to get back to the story she had been taught? Or had she been hypnotized into believing what she was saying?

Suddenly, he saw what Catriona meant.

The girl's face had changed, not just its expression but its shape. Her nose was rounder, her chin less sharp, her cheekbones gone. Her mouth had been thin, showing sharp teeth; now she had classic bee-stung lips, like Catriona's. Her curls were tighter, like little corkscrews.

He stood back from her, worried by what he had seen. He glanced at the rector's body, covered with its orange blanket. It was not possible, surely, that this child...

...this angel?

"What is it, man? What is it?"

Sir Arthur was agitated, impatient at being left out.

He must feel it humiliating not to have spotted the clue. Of course, he had come into it later and not seen the girl as she was when Winthrop and Catriona had arrived. It seemed now that her face had always been changing, subtly.

"Consider her face," Winthrop said.

"Yes."

"It changes."

The violet highlights were green now.

Sir Arthur gasped.

The girl looked older, twelve or thirteen. Her feet and ankles showed under the dressing gown. Her shoulders filled the garment out more. Her face was thinner again, eyes almost almond.

"This is not the girl who was taken away," Sir Arthur said. "She is one of *them*, a Changeling."

For the first time, Winthrop rather agreed with him.

"There are bad fairies," Sir Arthur said. "Who steal away children and leave one of their own in the crib."

Winthrop knew the folk-tales. He wasn't satisfied of their literal truth, but he realized in a flash that this girl might be an instance of whatever phenomenon gave rise to the stories in the first place.

You didn't have to believe in fairies to know the world was stranger than imagined.

"Who are you, Rose?" Catriona asked, gently.

She knelt before the girl, as Sir Arthur had done, looking up into her shifting face.

Winthrop couldn't help but notice that the girl's body had become more womanly inside the dressing gown. Her hair straightened and grew longer. Her eyebrows were thinner and arched.

"Rose?"

Catriona reached out.

The girl's face screwed up and she hissed, viciously. She opened her mouth, wider than she should have been able to. Her incisors were needle-fangs. She hissed again, flicking a long, fork-tipped tongue.

A spray of venom scattered at Catriona's face.

## 9: "Cruel Cunning"

The shock was so great she almost froze, but Catriona flung her hand in front of her eyes. The girl's sizzling spit stung the back of her hand. She wiped it instinctively on the carpet, scraping her skin raw. She had an idea the stuff was deadly.

The girl was out of her chair and towering above her now, shoulders and hips swaying, no longer entirely human. Her skin was greenish, scaled. Her eyes were red-green, with triangular pupils. Catriona thought she might even have nictitating membranes.

Catriona remembered the slither of the mamba.

She was frozen with utter panic, and a tiny voice inside nagged her for being weak.

Edwin seized the letter opener – the thin knife – from the desk and stabbed at the snake girl.

A black-thorned green hand took his wrist and bent it backwards. He dropped his weapon. Her hissing face closed in on his throat.

Catriona's panic snapped. She stuck her foot between the girl's ankles and scythed her legs out from under her.

They all fell in a tangle.

Rose broke free of them, leaving the dressing gown in a muddle on the floor.

She stood naked by Sir Arthur, body scaled and shimmering, as beautiful as horrid. She was striped in many shades of green, brown, yellow, red and black. She had the beginnings of a tail. Her hair was flat against her neck and shoulders, flaring like a cobra's hood. Her nose and ears were slits, frilled inside with red cilia.

Catriona and Edwin tried to get up, but were in each other's way.

Rose smiled, fangs poking out of her mouth, and laid her talons on Sir Arthur's lapels. She crooned to him, a sibilant susurrus of fascination. In the movements of her hips and shoulders and the arch of her eyes, there was a cruel cunning that was beyond human. This was a creature that killed for the pleasure of it, and was glad of an audience.

Sir Arthur was backed against a mantelpiece. His hand reached out, and found a plain crucifix mounted between two candlesticks. The Reverend Mr Haskins had evidently not been very High Church, for there were few other obvious signs of his profession in the room.

Rose's black-red lips neared Sir Arthur's face, to administer a killing kiss. Her fork-tipped tongue darted out and slithered between his eyes and across his cheek, leaving a shining streak.

Sir Arthur took the cross and interposed it between his face and hers. He pressed it to her forehead.

Rose reacted as if a drop of molten lead had been applied. She screeched inhumanly and turned away, crouching into a ball. The scales on her legs and back sizzled and disappeared, like butter pats on a hot grid-dle. Her body shrank again, with a cracking of bones.

"Oh my stars," said someone from the doorway.

Two men, strangers, stood in the hall, amazed at the scene. The one who spoke was a prosperous-looking man, face seamed and clothes practical. Behind him was the silhouette of someone large, soft and practically hairless.

Rose looked up at the newcomers. Her eyes were round again, and full of puzzlement rather than malice. Catriona had a sense that the monster was forgotten.

The girl snatched up the dressing gown and slipped into it, modestly closing it over her body. Then she hurled herself at a window, and crashed through the panes into the gathering dusk outside.

She hit the ground running and was off, away over the fields.

"I knew that weren't Aunt Rose," said the newcomer.

## 10: "Anti-Christine"

"The Great Beast is among you," announced the fat bald man, referring to himself rather than the departed Rose.

Sir Arthur still clung to the cross that had seen off the Rose creature.

"Of all things, I thought of *Dracula*," he said, wondering at his survival. "Bram Stoker's novel."

Winthrop was familiar with the book.

"The cross had exactly the effect on that creature as upon the vampires in *Dracula*."



"Ugh," said the bald man, "what a horrid thing. Put it away, Sir Arthur."

Farrar had noticed the rector's body, and was sunk into a couch with his head in his hands. This was too weird for most people. The honest farmer would have to leave these matters for the experts in the uncanny.

The man who had arrived with Farrar wore a once-expensive coat. The astrakhan collar was a little ragged and his pinstripe trousers shiny at the knees. A great deal of this fellow's time was spent on his knees, for one reason or other. His face was fleshy, great lips hanging loose. Even his hands were plump, slug-white flippers. His great dome shone and his eyes glinted with unhealthy fire.

Winthrop recognized the controversial figure of Aleister Crowley, self-styled "worst man in England." Quite apart from his well-known advocacy of black magic, sexual promiscuity and drug use, the brewery heir – perhaps from a spirit of ingrained contrariness – had blotted his copybook in loudly advocating the Kaiser's cause during the War. In his younger days, he was reckoned a daring mountaineer, but his vices had transformed him into a flabby remnant who looked as though he would find a steep staircase an insurmountable obstacle.

"Aren't you supposed to be skulking in Paris?" Winthrop asked.

"Evidently, sir, you have the advantage of me," Crowley admitted.

"Edwin Winthrop, of the Diogenes Club."

The black magician smiled, almost genuinely.

"Charles Beauregard's bright little boy. I have heard of you, and of your exploits among the shadows. And this charming *fille de l'occasion* must be Miss Catriona Kaye, celebrated exposé of charlatans. I believe you know that dreadful poseur A. E. Waite. Is it not well past time you showed him up for the faker he is, dear lady?"

Crowley loomed over Catriona. Winthrop remembered with alarm that he was famous for bestowing "the serpent's kiss," a mouth-to-mouth greeting reckoned dangerous to the receiving party. He contented himself with kissing her knuckles, like a gourmand licking the skin off a well-roasted chicken leg.

"And Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose fine yarns have given me and indeed all England such pleasure. This is a most distinguished company."

Sir Arthur, who could hardly fail to know who Crowley was, looked at his crucifix, perhaps imagining it might have an efficacy against the Great Beast.

If so, Crowley read his mind. "That bauble holds no terror for a magus of my exalted standing, Sir Arthur. It symbolizes an era which is dead and gone, but rotting all around us. I have written to Mr Trotsky in Moscow, offering to place my services at his disposal if he would charge me with the responsibility of eradicating Christianity from the planet."

"And has he written back?" Catriona asked, archly.

"Actually, no."

"*Quelle surprise!*"

Crowley flapped his sausage-fingers at her.

"Naughty, naughty. Such cynicism in one so young.

You would make a fine Scarlet Woman, my dear. You have all the proper attributes."

"My sins are scarlet enough already, Mr Crowley," Catriona replied. "And, to put it somewhat bluntly, I doubt from your general appearance that you would be up to matching them these days."

The magus looked like a hurt little boy. For an instant, Winthrop had a flash of the power this man had over his followers. He was such an obvious buffoon one might feel him so pathetic that to contradict his constant declamations of his own genius would be cruel. He had seriously harmed many people, and sponged unmercifully off many others. The Waite he had mentioned was, like the poet Yeats, another supposed initiate of a mystic order, with whom he had been conducting an ill-tempered feud over the decades.

"The time for the Scarlet Woman is ended," Crowley continued, back in flight. "Her purpose was always to birth the perfect being, and now that has been superseded. I hurried here on the boat train when news reached me that *she* had appeared on Earth. She who will truly bring to an end the stifling, milk-and-water age of the cloddish carpenter."

"I find your tone objectionable, man," Sir Arthur said. "A clergyman is dead."

"A modest achievement, I admit, but a good start."

"The fellow's mad," Sir Arthur blustered. "Quite cuckoo."

Winthrop tended to agree but wanted to hear Crowley out.

He nodded towards the smashed window. "What do you think she is, Crowley? The creature you saw attacking us?"

"I suppose Anti-Christ is too masculine a term. We shall have to get used to calling her the Anti-Christine."

Catriona, perhaps unwisely, giggled. She was rewarded with a lightning-look from the magus.

"She was brought to us by demons, in the centre of a circle of ancient sacrifice, enlivened by blood offerings. I have been working for many years to prepare the Earth for her coming, and to open the way for her appearance upon the great stage of magickal history. She has begun her reign. She has many faces. She is the get of the Whore of Babylon and the Goat of Mendes. She will cut a swathe through human society, mark my words. I shall be her tutor in sublime wickedness. There will be blood-letting and licence."

"For such a committed foe of Christianity, you talk a lot of Bible phrases," Winthrop said. "Your parents were Plymouth Brethren, were they not?"

"I sprang whole from the earth of Warwickshire. Is it not strange that such a small county could sire both of England's greatest poets?"

Everyone looked at him in utter amazement.

"Shakespeare was the other," he explained. "You know, the *Hamlet* fellow."

Sir Arthur was impatient and Catriona amused, but Winthrop was alert. This man could still be dangerous.

"The Great God Pan," Catriona said.

Crowley beamed, assuming she was describing him.

"It's a short story," she said. "By Arthur Machen. That's

where he's getting all this nonsense. He's casting Rose in the role of the anti-heroine of that fiction."

"Truths are revealed to us in fictions," Crowley said. "Sir Arthur, who has so skilfully blended the real and the imagined throughout his career, will agree. And so would Mr Stoker, whom you mentioned. There are many, indeed, who believe your employers, Mr Winthrop, are but the inventions of this literary knight."

Sir Arthur grumbled.

"At any rate, since the object of my quest is no longer here, I shall depart. It has been an unalloyed pleasure to meet you at such an exhilarating juncture."

Crowley gave a grunting little bow, and withdrew.

## 11: "A Living Looking-Glass"

"Well," said Catriona, hardly needing to elaborate on the syllable.

"He's an experience, and no mistake," Edwin admitted.

Having been yanked from horror into comedy, she was light-headed. It seemed absurd now, but she had been near death when the Rose Thing was closing on her throat.

"I see it," said Sir Arthur, suddenly.

He lifted the blanket from the rector's head and pointed to the ghastly wound with the crucifix. Despite everything else, Sir Arthur was pleased with himself, and amazed.

"I've made a *deduction*," he announced. "I've written too often of them, but never until now truly understood. It's like little wheels in your head, coming into alignment. Truly, a marvellous thing."

Sam Farrar looked up from his hands. He was glumly drained of all emotion, a common fellow unable to keep up with the high-flown characters, human and otherwise, who had descended into his life.

"The creature we saw had extended eye-teeth," Sir Arthur lectured. "Like a snake's fangs. Perhaps they were what put me in mind of Bram Stoker's vampires. Yet this wound, in the unfortunate Reverend Mr Haskins's throat, suggests a single stabbing implement. It is larger, rounder, more of a gouge than a bite. The thing we saw would have left two small puckered holes. Haskins was attacked by something different."

"Or something differently shaped," Edwin suggested.

"Yes, indeed. We have seen how the Changeling can alter her form. Evidently, she has a large repertoire."

Catriona tried to imagine what might have made the wound.

"It looks like an insect bite, Sir Arthur," she said, shuddering, "made by... good lord... a *gigantic mosquito*."

"Bart hated insects," Farrar put in, blankly. "Had a bad experience years ago. Never did get the whole story of it. If a wasp came in the room, he was froze up with fear."

An idea began to shape in her mind.

The Reverend Mr Haskins hated insects. And she had a horror of snakes. Earlier, she had thought Rose was the sort of child who presented herself to suit who she was with. That had been a real insight.

"She's who we think she is," she said.

Sir Arthur shook his head, not catching her drift.

"She is who we want her to be, or what we're afraid

she is," she continued. "Sir Arthur wished to think her a friend to the fairies, and so she seemed to be. Edwin, for you it would be most convenient if she were a fraud; when you thought that most strongly, she made the slip about the telephone. The Reverend Mr Haskins was in terror of insects, and she became one; I am not best partial to crawling reptiles, and so she took the form of a snake woman. Every little thing, she reacts to. When I asked her what her name was, she quoted mine back to me. Sir Arthur, you thought of a scene in a novel, and she played it out. She's like a living looking-glass, taking whatever we think of her and becoming exactly that thing."

Sir Arthur nodded, convinced at once. She was not a little flattered to detect admiration in his eyes. She had made a deduction too.

Edwin was more concerned.

"We've got to stop Crowley," he said.

"Crowley?" she questioned.

"If he gets hold of her, she'll become what *he* thinks she is. And he thinks she's the end the world."

## 12: "The Altar of Sex Magick"

There was only one place the Anti-Christine could have flown to: Angel Field, where once had stood a stone circle. Crowley knew Farrar Farm, since he had called there first, assuming the divine creature would be in the care of her supposed nephew. But Angel Field was a mystery, and there were no street-lights out here in the wilds of Sussex to guide the way.

Before departing, penniless, for England, he had telegraphed several of his few remaining disciples, beseeching funds and the loan of a car and driver. He was an international fugitive, driven from his Abbey of Thelema in Sicily at the express order of the odious Mussolini, and reduced to grubbing a living in Paris, with the aid of a former Scarlet Woman who was willing to sell her body on the streets to keep the magus in something approaching comfort.

He had left these damp, dreary islands for ever, he had hoped. He was no longer welcome in magical circles in London, brought low by the conspirings of lesser men who failed stubbornly to appreciate his genius.

No chauffeured car awaited him at Victoria, so he had hired one, trusting his manner and force of personality to convince one Alfred Jenkinsop, Esq, that he was good for the fee once the new age had dawned. As it happened, he expected the concept of money to be wiped away with all the other detritus of the dead past.

He found Jenkinsop in his car, outside Farrar Farm, reading *The Sporting Life* by torchlight. The fellow perked up to see him, and stuck his head out of the window.

"Have you seen a female pass this way?" Crowley asked.

Jenkinsop was remarkably obtuse on the point. It took him some moments to remember that he had, in fact, happened to see a girl, clad only in a dressing gown, running down the road from the rectory and onto the farm.

"Which way did she go?"

Jenkinsop shrugged. Crowley made a mental note to



erase his somewhat comical name from the record of this evening when he came to write the official history of how the Anti-Christine was brought to London as a protégée of the Great Beast.

"Come, man," he said, "follow me."

The driver showed no willingness to get out of the car.

"It's a cold night, guv," he said, as if that explained all.

Crowley left him to "the pink 'un," and trudged through Farrar's open front gate. His once-expensive shoes sank in mud and he felt icy moisture seep in through their somewhat strained seams. Nothing to one who had survived the treacherous glacial slopes of Chogo-Ri, but still a damned nuisance.

If Farrar's vandal of a grandfather hadn't smashed the stones, it would have been easier to find Angel Field. It was a cloudless night, but the moon was just a shining rind. He could make out the shapes of hedgerows, but little more.

He had an alarming encounter with a startled cow.

"Mistress Perfection," he called out.

Only mooing came back.

Finally, he discerned a fire in the night and made his way towards it. He knew his feet stood upon the sod of Angel Field. For the Anti-Christine was at the centre of the light, surrounded by her impish acolytes.

They were attendant demons, Crowley knew. Naked, hairless and without genitals. They had smooth, grey, dwarf bodies and large black insect eyes. Some held peculiar implements with lights at their extremities. They all turned, with one fluid movement, to look at him.

She was magnificent. Having shed her snakeskin, she had become the essence of voluptuous harlotry, masses of electric gorgon-hair confined by a shining circlet of silver, robe gaping open immodestly over her gently swelling belly, wicked green eyes darting like flames. Her teeth were still sharp. She looked from side to side, smile twisted off-centre.

This was the rapturous creature who would degrade the world.

Crowley worshipped her.

The occasion of their meeting called for a ceremony. The imps gathered around him, heads bobbing about his waist-height. Some extended spindle-fingered hands, tipped with sucker-like appendages, and touched him.

He unloosed his belt and dropped his trousers and drawers. He knelt, knees well-spaced, and touched his forehead to the cold, wet ground.

One of the imps took its implement and inserted it into Crowley's rectum. He bit a mouthful of grassy sod as the implement expanded inside him.

Crowley's body was the altar of sex magick.

The commingling of pain and pleasure was not new to him. This was quite consistent with the theory and practice of magick he had

devised over many years of unparalleled scholarship. As the metallic probe pulsed inside him like living flesh, he was thrust forward into his new golden dawn.

The imp's implement was withdrawn.

Hands took Crowley's head and lifted it from the dirt. The Anti-Christine looked at him with loathing and love. Their mouths opened, and they pounced. Crowley trapped her lower lip between his teeth and bit until his mouth was full of her blood. He broke the serpent's kiss, and she returned in kind, nipping and nibbling at his nose and dewlaps.

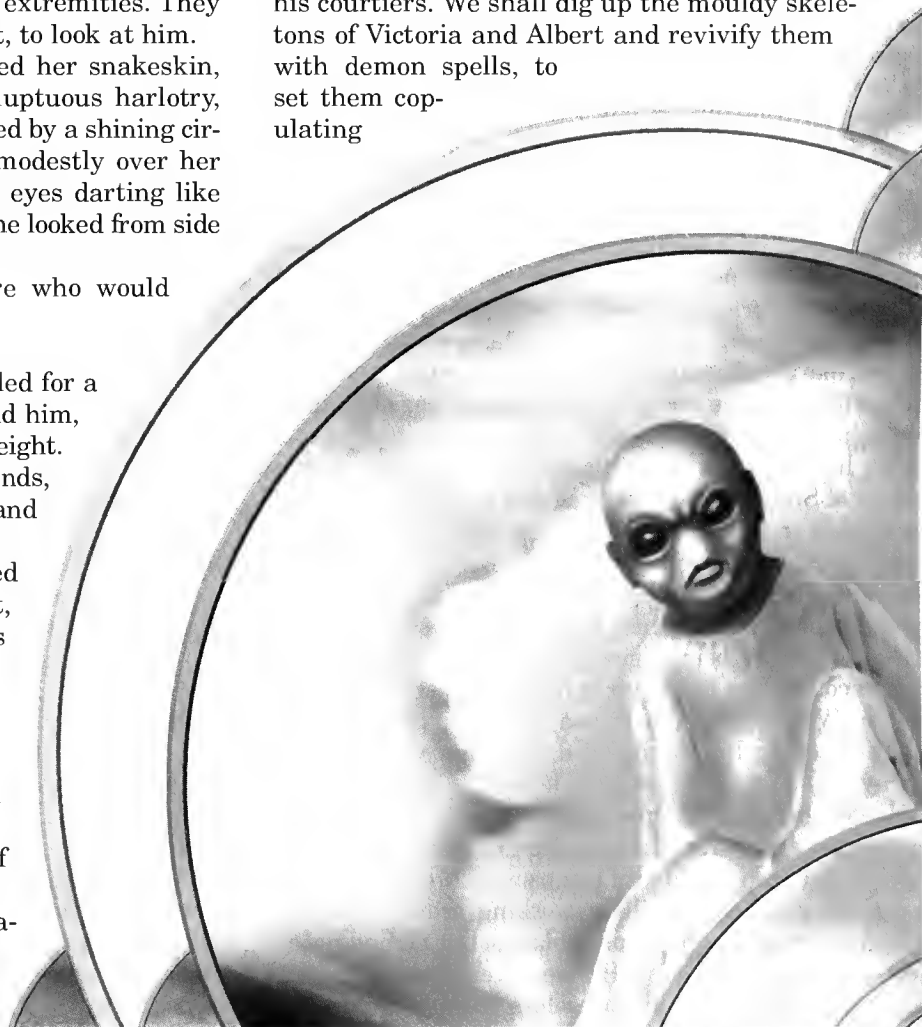
Her lips were rouged with her own blood, and marked with his teeth.

*Oh joy!*

"Infernal epitome," he addressed her, "we must get you quickly to London, where you can spread your leathery wings, open your scaled legs and begin to exert a real influence. We shall start with a few seductions, of men and women naturally, petty and great persons, reprobates and saints. Each shall spread your glorious taint, which will flash through society like a new tonic."

She looked pleased by the prospect.

"There will be fire and pestilence," he continued. "Duels and murders and many, many suicides. Piccadilly Circus will burn like Nero's Rome. Pall Mall will fall to the barbarians. The Thames will run red and brown with the blood and ordure of the King and his courtiers. We shall dig up the mouldy skeletons of Victoria and Albert and revivify them with demon spells, to set them copulating



like mindless mink in Horseguards' Parade. St Paul's shall be turned into a brothel of Italianate vileness, and Westminster Abbey made an adjunct to the London Zoological Gardens, turned over to obscene apes who will defecate and fornicate where the foolishly pious once sat. The London *Times* will publish blasphemies and pornography, illustrated only by the greatest artists of the age. The Lord Mayor's head will be used as a ball in the Association Football Cup Final. Cocaine, heroin and the services of child prostitutes will be advertised in posters plastered to the sides of all omnibuses. Willie Blasted Yeats shall be burned in effigy in place of Saint Guy Fawkes on every November 5th, and all the other usurpers of the Golden Dawn laid low in their own filth. All governments, all moralities, all churches, will collapse. The City will burn, must burn. Only we Secret Chiefs will retain our authority. You shall beget many children, homunculi. It will be a magnificent age, extending for a thousand times a thousand years."

In her shining, darting eyes, he saw it was all true. He buttoned up his trousers and spirited her away to where Jenkinsop waited with the car, unwitting herald of welcome apocalypse.

### 13: "The Fire-Wheel"

Winthrop held *Katie's* stick forward, flying at an angle, nose into the wind, so the dark, shadowed quilt of Sussex filled his view. The dawnlight just pricked at the East, flashing off ponds and streams. Night-flying was tricky in a country dotted with telegraph poles and tall trees, but at least there wasn't some Fokker stalking him. He tried to keep the Camel level with the tiny light funnels that were the headlamps of what must be Crowley's car.

They had got to Farrar Farm just after Crowley's departure, with Rose or Christine or whatever the girl chose to be called. He had set Catriona and Sir Arthur on their tail in the Bentley, and borrowed Sir Arthur's surprisingly sprightly runabout to make his way to the airfield at Falmer, where his aeroplane was hangared. It was like the War again, rousing a tired ground staff to get him into the air within minutes of his strapping on helmet and boots.

He had assumed few automobiles would be on the roads of Sussex at this hour of the morning, but had homed in on a couple of trundling milk trucks before picking up the two vehicles he assumed were Crowley's car and his own Bentley. He trusted Catriona at the wheel, though Sir Arthur had seemed as startled at the prospect of being driven by a woman as he had when confronted by the girl's monstrous snake-shape. When Winthrop had last seen them, Sir Arthur was still clutching his crucifix and Catriona was tucking stray hair under her sweet little hat.

He wished he had time to savour the thrill of being in the air again. He also regretted not storing ammunition and even a couple of bombs with *Katie*. Her twin machine-guns were still in working order, synchronized to fire through the prop blades, but he had nothing to fire out of them. His revolver was under his jacket, but would be almost useless: it was hard to give

accurate fire while flying one-handed, with one's gun-arm flapping about in 60-mile-an-hour airwash.

Suddenly, the sun rose. In the West.

A blast of daylight fell on one side of Winthrop's face. He felt a tingle as if he were being sun-burned. For a moment, the air currents were all wrong, and he nearly lost control of *Katie*.

The landscape below was bleached by light. The two cars were quite distinct on the road. They were travelling between harvested wheat-fields. There were circles and triangles etched into the stubble, shapes that reminded Winthrop of those on Rose's silver ribbon.

Winthrop looked at the new sun.

It was a wheel of fire, travelling in parallel with *Katie*. He pulled back the stick and climbed up into the sky, and the fire-shape climbed with him. Then it whizzed underneath the Camel and came up on his right side.

He looped up, back and below, feeling the tug of gravity in his head and the safety harness cutting into his shoulders. It would take a demon from hell to out-fly a Sopwith Camel in anger, as the fire-wheel recognized instantly by shooting off like a Guy Fawkes rocket, whooshing up in a train of sparks.

*Katie* was now flying even, and sparks fell fizzing all around. Winthrop was afraid they were incendiaries of unknown design, but they passed *through* his fuselage and wings, dispersing across the fields.

His eyes were blotched with light-bursts. It was dark again and the fire-wheel gone. Winthrop recalled the stories of the signs in the sky at the time of Rose Farrar's disappearance. He assumed he had just had personal experience of them. He would make sure they went into the report.

Proper dawn was upon them.

A long straight stretch of road extended ahead of Crowley's car. They were nearing the outskirts of the city. Crowley's driver must be a good man, or possessed of magical skills, since the Bentley was lagging behind.

He knew he had to pull a reckless stunt.

Throttling *Katie* generously, he swooped low over the car and headed off to the left, getting as far ahead of Crowley as possible, then swung round in a tight semi-circle, getting his nose in alignment with the oncoming vehicle. He would only get one pass at this run.

He took her down, praying the road had been maintained recently.

*Katie's* wheels touched ground, lifted off for a moment, and touched ground again.

Through the whirling prop, Winthrop saw Crowley's car. They were on a collision course.

The car would be built more sturdily than the canvas and wood plane. But *Katie* had whirling twin blades in her nose, all the better to scythe through the car's bonnet and windshield, and severely inconvenience anyone in the front seat.

Crowley might think himself untouchable. But he wouldn't be doing his own driving.

Winthrop hoped a rational man was behind the wheel of Crowley's car.

The distance between the two speeding vehicles nar-



rowed.

Winthrop was oddly relaxed, as always in combat. A certain fatalism possessed him. If it was the final prang, so be it. He whistled under his breath.

It had been a good life. He was grateful to have known Cat, and the Old Man. He had done his bit, and a bit more besides. And he was with *Katie* at the last.

Crowley's car swerved, plunging through a hedgerow. Winthrop whooped in triumph, exultant to be alive. He cut the motors and upturned the flaps. Wind tore at the wings as *Katie* slowed.

Another car was up ahead.

The Bentley.

#### 14: "I believe..."

Catriona pressed down on the foot-brake with all her strength. She was not encouraged by Sir Arthur's loud prayer. The aeroplane loomed large in the windshield, prop blades slowing but still deadly. She couldn't remember whether they were wood or metal, but guessed it wouldn't make much difference.

The Bentley and the Camel came to a halt, one screeching and the other purring, within a yard of each other. She recommenced breathing and unclenched her stomach. That was not an experience she would care to repeat.

Somewhat shaken, she and Sir Arthur climbed out of the car. Edwin was already on the ground, pulling off his flying helmet. He had his revolver.

"Come on, you fellows," he said. "The enemy's downed."

She helped Sir Arthur along the road. The car they had been pursuing had jumped the verge and crashed into a hedge. Crowley was extricating himself from the front seat with some difficulty. A stunned driver sat in the long grass, thrown clear of his car, shaking his head.

The rear door of the car was kicked open and a female fury exploded from it.

Rose was in mostly human shape, but Catriona could tell from her blazing snake-eyes she had been filled with Crowley's cracked fancies. She was transformed into a species of demonic Zuleika Dobson, set to enslave and conquer and destroy London and then the world. As the dawnlight shone in the Anti-Christine's frizzy halo of hair, Catriona believed this creature was capable of fulfilling Crowley's mad prophecies. She was a young woman now, still recognizably the child she had been, but with a cast of feature that suggested monumental cruelty and desperate vice. Her hands were tipped with claw-nails.

Her inky eyes radiated something. Hypnotic black swirls wound in her pupils. She was humming, almost sub-audially, radiating malicious female energy. Sir Arthur gasped. And Edwin skidded to a halt. The revolver fell from his hand.

Catriona was appalled. Even these men, whom she respected, were struck by Rose. Then, she was fascinated. It was alien to her, but she saw what magnificence this creature represented. This was not madness, but...

No, she decided. It was madness.

"You are powerless to stop her," Crowley yelled. "Bow down and worship her filthiness!"

Catriona fixed Rose's eyes with her own.

She took Sir Arthur's hand and reached out for Edwin's. He hesitated, eyes on Rose's body, then clutched. Catriona held these men fast.

It was Sir Arthur who gave her the idea. And, perhaps, another distinguished author-knight, J.M. Barrie.

"Do you believe in fairies?" she asked.

Crowley looked aghast.

Sir Arthur and Edwin understood.

With all her heart, she imagined benevolence, worshipped purity, conceived of goodness, was enchanted by kindly magic. As a child, she had loved indiscriminately, finding transcendent wonders in sparkling dew on spun webs, in fallen leaves become galleons on still ponds.

"I believe in fairies," she declared.

She recognized her kinship with the kindly knight. She was a sceptic about many things, but there was real magic. She could catch it in her hand and shape it.

The English countryside opened up for her.

She truly believed.

Rose was transfixed. She dwindled inside her dressing gown, became a girl again. Dragonfly wings sprouted from her back, and delicate feelers extended from her eyebrows. She hovered a few inches above the grass. Flowers wound around her brow. She shone with clean light.

Sir Arthur was tearful with joy, transported by the sight. Edwin squeezed her hand.

Spring flowers sprouted in the autumn hedgerow.

Crowley was bewildered.

"No," he said, "you are scarlet, not watercolour."

He was cracked and had lost.

"Come here," Catriona said, to the girl.

Rose, eight years old again and human, skipped across the road and flew into her arms, hugging her innocently. Catriona passed her on to Sir Arthur, who swept her up and held her fiercely to him.

"I think your new age has been postponed," Edwin told Crowley.

"Curse you," Crowley swore, shaking his fist like the melodrama villain he wished he was.

"You're going to pay for the car, sir," said the driver. "Within the hour."

Crowley was cowed. He looked like a big baby in daylight. His bald head was smudged and his trousers were badly ripped and stained.

There were new people on the scene. She supposed it was inevitable. You couldn't land a biplane and crash a car without attracting attention.

Two men stood on the other side of the road. Catriona didn't know where they could have come from. She had heard no vehicle and there were no dwellings in sight.

Rose twisted in Sir Arthur's hug to look at the men.

Catriona remembered what the girl had said about the friends of the Little People. Undertakers in smoked glasses.

The two men were the same height, tall even without their black top hats. They wore black frock coats, black trousers, black cravats, black gloves. Even black spats and black-tinted glasses that seemed too large for human eyes. Their faces were ghost-white, with thin lips.

"They've come for me," Rose said. "I must go away

with them."

Gently, Sir Arthur set her down. She kissed him, then kissed Catriona and Edwin, even Crowley.

"Don't worry about me," she said, sounding grown-up, and went to the undertakers. They each took one of her hands and walked her down the road, towards a shimmering light. For a while, the three figures were silhouetted. Then they were gone, and so was the light.

Edwin turned to look at her, and shrugged.

### 15: "The Vicinity of the Inexplicable"

The Old Man nodded sagely when Winthrop concluded his narrative. He did not seem surprised by even the most unusual details.

"We've come across these undertakers before," Beau-regard said. "All in black, with hidden eyes. They appear often in the vicinity of the inexplicable. Like the Little Grey People."

They were back in the Strangers Room.

"I suppose we should worry about Rose," Winthrop mused, "but she told us not to. Considering that she seems to be whatever we think she is, she might have meant that it would be helpful if we thought of her as safe and well since she would then, in fact, be so. It was Cat who saw through it all, and hit upon the answer."

Catriona was thoughtful.

"I don't know, Edwin," she said. "I don't think we saw a quarter of the real picture. The Little Grey Peo-

ple, the fire-wheel in the skies, the Changeling, the undertakers. All this has been going on for a long time, since well before the original Rose was taken away. We were caught between the interpretations put on the phenomena in the last few days by Sir Arthur and Crowley, fairies and the Anti-Christine. In the last century, it was angels and demons. Who knows what light future researchers will shine upon the business?"

Winthrop sipped his excellent brandy.

"I shouldn't bother yourself too much about that, old thing. We stand at the dawn of a new era, not the apocalypse Crowley was prattling about but an age of scientific enlightenment. Mysteries will be penetrated by rational inquiry. We shall no longer need to whip up fairy tales to cope with the fantastical. Mark my words, Catty-Kit. The next time anything like this happens, we shall get to the bottom of it without panic or hysteria."

---

**Kim Newman's** most recent novel is *Life's Lottery* (Simon & Schuster; reviewed last issue) and his most recent work of non-fiction is *Cat People* (British Film Institute). His last stories here were "A Victorian Ghost Story" (issue 139) and "Just Like Eddy" (issue 148). He lives in London.

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# Bukavu Dreams

*Paul Park*

**A**t the ten o'clock mass, Father Bizima takes a collection for the survivors of Lyons. He lived in Europe for half his life, and there are tears in his eyes when he makes his appeal. Alphonsine puts two francs into the bowl, and Sergeant Kengo nods his head. He understands her feelings, though money is scarce.

Outside Notre Dame cathedral it's a bright September day. Kengo and his wife walk down the hill, followed by his older daughters. He kisses Alphonsine as they reach the Avenue de l'Athénée, where she turns off to the market with the girls. One of the new men pedals past, ringing his bell. Kengo waves, then follows him down toward the lake.

The prefecture fills half of the old Riviera Hotel, right at the junction of the Botte. Kengo enjoys the walk down through the centre of town along Kabila Boulevard. This week it has rained every morning and the streets are clean. Now at midday the small vendors are opening up, and they smile and offer cigarettes. After Bizima's sermon, the sergeant feels thankful and sad. Bukavu is a beautiful city still. Five years of peace since Independence, thank God. One has seen photographs of Paris and they turn the stomach.

He's humming a small tune as he passes the Lumumba Monument. He peels off his white gloves, puts them into his armpit, rubs his hands. His uniform is newer than his suit, so he's worn it to church. Besides, he's promised to stop by the station before joining Alphonsine at her mother's house for dinner. These days there's often some catastrophe, and they are undermanned.

He's right; there's someone in the holding pen. A man in his 40s, wire glasses, long stringy blond hair, dull eyes, emaciated. No French, no Kiswahili, unless he's pretending. He's been arrested for selling dagga, after all.

Kengo talks to Jean-Marie, who's on the desk. He's from the hills between Walikale and the Congolese border, so they speak French. "Pas de passport?"

"Non. Deux kilos de contraband, neuf dollars, et un billet de cinquante mille Deutschmarks. Rien de valeur."

Kengo shrugs. "Sauf que le sentiment." He walks over to the cage and grasps one of the bars. "Sprechen sie Deutsch?" Though if the man responds, what then? But he says nothing. He's sitting on the bench, drunk on banana beer, clutching an empty packet of Sportsmans.

"Quelle pagaille," mutters Sergeant Kengo. These refugees are a new development. They've been drifting



in over the past six months, crossing through the forest or in small boats from Rwanda over the lake. They stand outside the Marche d'X, showing off their burns or missing fingers. Now there are women too, French and German, begging or prostituting in the villages. How did they get this far? Or is this where all the money finally runs out for everyone, in his poor country? Nine dollars, my God. But a sum like that might easily get mislaid.

Now the man stirs. He stands up in the middle of the cage. "You fucking kaffir bastards," he says. "I've got to piss."

Kengo knows no English, though the man's meaning is obvious. The more so after he unzips his pants and, wonder of wonders, urinates right there in the middle of the cage. His penis is very long, very thin, Kengo notices before he turns away.

He leaves Jean-Marie to call for the concierge, and walks down the hall to the office he shares with Lt. Souza and two others. Today he has it to himself. He throws his kepi and gloves onto the desk, sends the boy out for coffee, and stands looking out the window, a wall of small glass squares. An overgrown garden descends through pines and eucalyptus to the shore. Clouds of mist still linger on Lake Kivu. The water is striped blue and white.

The hotel was built in the 1930s for the families of Belgian civil servants on vacation. In Kengo's childhood it was full of engineers and *mzungu* tourists. There are glass bricks, yellow zig-zags in the plaster in the art-deco style. The whole Botte, the part of town built on the peninsula, was more or less whites-only even in Mobutu's time. Or else it had seemed that way to him when he was young – dilapidated villas full of ghosts.

He stands listening to the muffled shouting in the hall. Then he turns on the short-wave on the lieutenant's desk and finds a station in Kigali which plays classical music on Sunday afternoons. It's an orchestral piece which he recognizes but can't name, and for a moment he stands irritated at himself, tapping his fingers on Souza's blotter. But then the boy comes in with coffee and the paper.

Now finally everything is calm. The prisoner seems to have been subdued. Kengo sits down at his desk, rubs his face, smells his fingers. He loves these afternoons when he can be here by himself. His house is so small. He reads some old magazines and then leafs through the rough, smudged pages of *Kivu-Match*. Again there's a report of poachers in Kahuzi-Biega, which can't be tolerated. He puts his feet up on his desk, listening to the music on the radio. By the time the international news comes on, he's already asleep.

But some of the images from the broadcast work their way into his dream. There's a storm over the lake, a black cloud blowing from the north. Lightning strikes the tallest trees, while others are bent double in the shuddering gusts of wind. Thunder buzzes like a distant aircraft, too high up, too far away to see.

At first there's no rain. Kengo walks along the Avenue du Lac as darkness gathers. He sees the outline of a big house near the old tennis club, and when the first drops come he opens the gate and walks down the overgrown path. He climbs the rotting stairs onto the porch.

The house is empty. There's no furniture in the big

rooms. White curtains blow in from open windows on the ground floor. Now the breeze off the lake is wet. Raindrops streak the glass.

Because this is a dream, he smells nothing, hears nothing. He stands with his back to the wall in one of the big rooms, watching the rain spatter in over the window sill, watching it darken the wooden floor. He leans against the blue and silver paper. When she comes in, she doesn't know he's there. She stands in the centre of the room. Her raincoat drips. She wears a scarf over her yellow hair. She takes off the coat, the scarf, and hangs them over the top of one of the open glass doors. She kicks off her wet shoes, and when she turns on the electric chandelier, he can see the wet marks of her stockings on the floor.

She wears wire-rimmed glasses, which are fogged up, and she pulls her shirt-tail out to wipe them. She is 19 or 20 – no more. Now, even though he's moving toward her, she can't see him with her glasses off. Or if she does, she takes no notice. She turns and walks away.

When he wakes up, he finds he has fallen forward with his cheek on his desk. His neck hurts and he has an erection. He feels as if he's been watching an old silent film, and then suddenly the stock has shattered in the department's ancient reel-to-reel.

He knows he must go meet his family at his mother-in-law's house, but for a moment he just sits and listens to the rain outside his office window.

Before they were married, he and Alphonsine used to make love many times a day. Sometimes he would meet her in her mother's house. She would visit him where he was working. She had no shame. She would put her tongue into his ear, lick and kiss his dirty places. She rarely kissed him on the lips.

As time goes on, it gets harder and harder to be yourself, express yourself to those you love the most. Too much is at stake. Now like most men in an official position he has a woman he goes to every Friday afternoon. It's a waste of money, for one thing. And now at night with Alphonsine he's like a boy. He doesn't know what to do.

He puts his feet on the desk again. Later, not quite half-asleep, he sees himself picking up an allotment of petrol at the station on the Avenue de la Brasserie. The custodian of the park has sent a boy to ask for police assistance. A gorilla has been found decapitated, shot through the chest, part of the body cooked and eaten. His father, an old silverback named Coco, comes to the Tshivanga station at five o'clock on Saturday morning and leads the guides to a clearing in the bamboo forest on Biega Mountain. His wives and other children hide in the bush.

Kengo wheels out the velo onto the Katana road. He wonders whether he should let the messenger ride behind him. It is a distance of 30 kilometres, all uphill. But dignity is important in these cases. Besides, what would the boy do with his bicycle?

*He takes the turn toward Kisangani and climbs west away from the lake, through abandoned plantations of cinchona, coffee, tea. And then into the high forest.*

*The station house was built for Father Paul d'Alem-*

bert, a Belgian primatologist who lived there off and on for 75 years, until finally he was murdered by the Hutu militia. His grave is in a garden of ficus trees behind the house. On Sundays, Coco and his family bring long flowering vines out of the forest and twist them round the stone. This behaviour is not typical. There was a story about it in the final issue of *National Geographic*, several years before. Lt. Souza keeps the pages pinned together in his desk.

Because the money and the tourists are all gone, the gorillas have retreated into the forest. Only Coco stays, an evil-looking brute two metres tall, 250 kilogrammes. His portrait is on the five-franc note. And he was always the most remarkable, with his vocabulary of over 700 signs and phrases, his familiarity with such concepts as freedom and God. D'Alembert used to talk to him for hour after hour in a language no one else learned how to speak. Still he comes round most afternoons, hoping to find somebody to talk to. The village boys who live at Tshivanga now, they're not the ones, thinks Kengo as he rides up through the banana trees. It's evening, and the sun's already down behind the leaves.

He parks in the overgrown lot, walks through the shadows to the house. Three boys dressed in shorts and t-shirts are smoking a hand-rolled cigarette on the porch. They pass it back and forth among themselves, then to a chimpanzee who is tethered to the steps, a chain around its collar. Its wrist is long and limp. It smokes expertly, staring up with bleared, red-rimmed eyes.

Kengo rubs his gloves together. He stands before them with his feet apart, shrugging and gesturing, though no words are spoken. One boy points with his machete to an opening in the bush. A path has been hacked out through the undergrowth.

Kengo has nothing, no food, no water, no stick. He's wearing his hat, his uniform, his white gloves. In the welling twilight he starts down the path. Hyraxes scream. Insects chatter and whine.

Now perhaps there's a big moon or a strange light from the stars, but even after several hours it is not completely dark. The track is cut close to the ground, easy to follow. And there is an animal moving parallel to him 50 metres to his left. When he stops, it stops. It disappears for a moment, and then he sees it up ahead, a motionless shadow. It's not Coco, but a smaller gorilla, perhaps a baby or an unattached male.

For several minutes Kengo stands still. There are mosquitoes around his head. He tries walking back the way he came, but the gorilla follows him. When he stops, it stops.

Kengo's white gloves shine in the darkness. He thinks if he rushes forward, the gorilla will flee away. So he runs toward it up the track, waving his arms. He cries out, but doesn't make a sound.

And the gorilla starts running too, not into the bush, but toward him. In a moment it has jumped into his arms. It locks its legs around his waist, its arms around his neck.

He has to spread his legs, hold onto a vine to support its weight. He turns his head, and he can see its long eyelashes, its black eye. Sweat is running down his

neck, and he feels the soft lips of the animal as it nuzzles him. He feels its soft tongue on his neck.

Then it clammers down his legs and takes him by the hand. It leads him away from the track into the sheer forest. Yet Kengo follows easily. A fire is burning up ahead.

Three Europeans are sleeping in a clearing beside a small circle of embers. A plume of smoke drifts up. Kengo can see the stars.

He turns around, but the baby gorilla has disappeared. It has lumbered silently into the bush. Kengo walks around the clearing, and then approaches the sleeping figures from the side nearest their heads, which lie close together. He squats down to examine them.

So young, my God. Two boys and a girl, all in their teens. The girl lies on her back in a green sleeping bag, which she has unzipped in the warm night. Mosquitoes gather on her yellow hair. Kengo moves his hand to chase them away.

Her wire-rimmed glasses are on a cloth beside her head. Her mouth has fallen open, and he can see her teeth. She has a beautiful, wide mouth. For several minutes he squats over her, admiring her neck, her collar bone, her breasts, which he can see under her checked flannel shirt, unbuttoned at the top. He moves his gloved hand back and forth over her face, keeping the mosquitoes away.

Kengo is a burly man, and it's uncomfortable for him to squat like this. When he shifts his weight, his joints crack. Suddenly one of the boys has woken up. He rolls away, then comes to his knees holding a gun.

He calls out in a language Kengo doesn't understand. The other two sit up. The boy with the gun is standing now. Kengo rises with his hands held out; he hopes the uniform will protect him. Surely it's a serious thing to fire on a policeman, no matter where you're from, what horrors you've seen. In fact he disarms the boy quite easily.

Or in another moment he imagines differently. The gun is in his hand. He's taken it from the boy, but not before two silent shots were fired. A bullet has hit him in the shoulder.

It's an unpleasant feeling. For a while he can still move his left arm, but then the muscles stiffen. Blood drips down his chest under his shirt.

The two boys run away into the darkness. They crash through the undergrowth, and he can hear them for a long time. With his right hand he probes the left shoulder of his jacket, and his glove comes away with blood on it.

He hears a whimper in the darkness, and he goes back to where the girl is lying. Kneeling down, in a moment he sees she's been shot through the chest. The wound is hopeless and she knows it. Her eyes are big, shining in the strange light. He takes her in his arms, and she bleeds to death in spite of all his efforts. Grateful, she whispers to him, though he doesn't understand. Perhaps she's giving him a message for her family. "Sprechen sie Deutsch," he murmurs, though if she does, what then?

Then he wakes up, and he's fallen forward onto his

desk again. His mouth feels big and swollen, pushed out of shape by the pressure of the damp wood.

He's been roused by the sound of a disturbance. Jean-Marie is shouting his name, so Kengo goes out into the hall. Inside the cage, the prisoner is holding onto the bars and banging his head against them. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," he says.

Kengo pulls open the lock and walks into the cage, holding out his hands. "S'il te plait," he murmurs, but the prisoner comes forward with his fists raised. Blood runs from his forehead over his cheeks. Kengo is stronger than this drunken mzungu, but he's still groggy from his nap. Before he's able to wrestle the man down, his eye has been blackened, his lip split.

Then Jean-Marie is there and another patrolman. They take turns slapping the white man's face. Then they pull him to his feet. Kengo watches for a moment as they take him down the hall toward the door into the yard. They will beat him, Kengo's sure.

But it's time to meet Alphonsine and the family. He goes into the cabinet behind the desk and washes his face in the sink. Then he stares at himself in the cracked mirror. The skin over his eye has begun to swell. He dabs at his lip with a wet rag.

Outside it's dark already, and he's late. What a beautiful cool evening. Over the past year people have been predicting radiation storms and terrible weather out of the north, but so far none of that has come. Walking

uphill toward Ibanda, at moments he feels anxious and depressed, at moments happy and calm. The air seems to hold currents of sadness, currents of hope, and he moves through them past the old Residence Hotel, the broken buildings of the Belgian commercial centre. An empire of the mind has come to dust.

Alphonsine is waiting at the corner of the dark street. She's a big woman, and he recognizes her from far away. She paces back and forth along the broken sidewalk, a shawl over her shoulders. Reflexively, he allows a stagger of weariness into his step, and she runs toward him. With one hand she holds her flowered shawl closed on her breast, and with the other she's touching his eye, his face. She pulls him under the dim streetlight, making small sounds under her breath. "I was worried," she says. "I heard there was a fight in Nyamugo and some looting. When you didn't come..."

He pats her hand. He smiles. "Don't be afraid."

Paul Park has appeared once before in *Interzone*, with "The Tourist" (issue 80). Born in 1954, he is known for his widely-praised sf novels *Soldiers of Paradise* (1987), *Sugar Roin* (1989), *The Cult of Loving Kindness* (1991) and *Coelestis* (1993). He lives in Massachusetts, but has travelled extensively.

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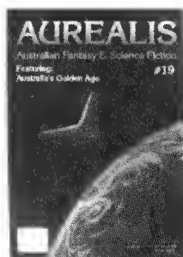


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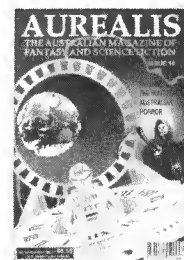
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"The history of humanity is clearly one of improvement," says Robert J. Sawyer, Canadian-born-and-based novelist, short story-writer and essayist. "It really does seem that things are getting better. People live longer than they did in the past. We solve more and more of our conflicts non-violently these days. We have our consciousness raised about environmental issues. Sure, we've got a long way to go still, but we are making progress, and the future is doubtless going to be better than the past. I've got unshakeable faith in humanity, and look forward to the next century with great anticipation."

This statement, I think, fairly accurately reflects the optimistic tone that can be found in Sawyer's novels, of which there are now a dozen (with more on the way). Robert J. Sawyer, both in print and in interview, has good things to say about the world, about people; he deals in a currency of goodwill, where the trust that we hand him at the start of the book is repaid, with interest, in the thoughtful and frequently emotional denouements. Indeed, the philosophical air that he exhibits in his novels is also present in his responses. It is interesting to note that one of the few times that he exhibits a note of apprehension, or of disappointment (temporarily), is when the subject is his impression of his own work.

"Oh, I always think I've fallen short in some way or another," he says. "In my first novel, *Golden Fleece*, there was a principal character named Kirsten that I just didn't know what to do with at the end of the book. And *Foreigner* really ended up being three novellas intertwined, rather than a coherent novel. In each novel, I try to find an intimate human story to counterpoint the big-canvas sf plot, but I never quite found one that was appropriate for *Illegal Alien*. *Flash-forward* is a fine book, but I'm not sure I did enough emotionally with the death of one character's daughter. So, sure, there are things that I wished I could have done better, but it's never for lack of trying. And I think any writer who is too easily satisfied is never going to grow." After all of which he feels compelled to redress the balance somewhat. "Still, it's probably only fair to mention those books I think are most successful: *Factoring Humanity* is the one I want to be remembered for, although I think *The Terminal Experiment* and *Frameshift* also both ended up being very close to what I'd hoped."

Any pride or modesty notwithstanding, however, some impressive statistics are in Sawyer's favour. With his work available in Bulgarian, Dutch, French, German, Italian,

# BEYOND HUMANITY



**Robert J. Sawyer**

*interviewed by David Mathew*

Japanese, Polish, Russian and Spanish, he is, and I quote from his website, "the only author in history to win the top science fiction awards in the United States, Japan, France, and Spain; in addition, he's won more Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards ('Auroras') than any other English-language author." He's had the Nebula (for *The Terminal Experiment*), but to date the Hugo has eluded him, despite having been nominated for it on five occasions. He has reported on sf for CBC Radio and for The Discovery Channel Canada...

And then there is the website itself: one of the largest in existence that is dedicated to a single author, it has hours of reading for any interested party. "My website – at [www.sfwriter.com](http://www.sfwriter.com) – was founded in June 1995. Only about one day a month of work goes into it, but over four years that's added up to almost ten work-weeks, I guess, which is how the darned thing got to be so elaborate. But these days my wife Carolyn does all maintenance of it. After I won the Nebula Award in 1996 my income took a nice upward swing, so much so that my wife was able to quit her job and come work full-time for me as my salaried assistant; one of her many jobs is taking care of the website. I started the site because, even in 1995, it seemed to me that the web was going to be huge. I wanted to make it easy for people to sample my books at their leisure – to try before they buy, so to speak – and putting up sample chapters seemed the best way to do that. And then I thought, well, I should add some short stories, and some essays, and some interviews, and it just grew and grew and grew; it now has over half a million words of text on it."

*Flashforward*, the "fine book" he mentions above, is Sawyer's latest. In it, the population of the world sees a point in history (each person's individual history) some 20-odd years from the novel's present, which is the reader's future. If such a situation, or mental journey, were to happen to him, he would "like to see a Hugo on my mantel – after five nominations in four years, this losing thing is getting a bit tiresome! I really do think *Factoring Humanity* (the previous novel) is the best book I've ever written, and I do hope the Hugo voters will concur. The thing I'd least like to see is a bunch of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* novels on my brag shelf (the bookshelf that contains copies of my own books); that would mean either that my career had faltered big-time, or, even worse, that there just isn't any original, stand-alone sf being published any more...

"The idea for *Flashforward* occurred to me in October 1995. My wife and I threw a party in honour of the 20th anniversary of the founding of our high-school science-fiction club, which is where we met. We got a lot of the old gang together and, over and over, people kept saying, 'If I only knew then what I know now,' meaning that bad marriages or wrong career choices or just stupid accidents could have been avoided. The supposition was clearly that certain knowledge of the future would be a good thing. Well, my job as an sf writer is to examine the underlying assumptions, to look for the ramifications that aren't obvious on the surface, and *Flashforward* is my exploration of whether or not such knowledge would in fact be beneficial or comforting."

The scientific experiment that begins the book (and which might, or might not, cause the phenomenon) implies a question: Can science be inherently evil? "That's one I've wrestled with over the years," Sawyer answers; "I'm not exactly sure. I know I don't accept that National Rifle Association crap that says, 'guns don't kill people – people do.' It's the poindexters, the boffins, the scientists who make guns and bombs and chemical weapons. The guys who want these weapons generally aren't bright enough to make them themselves; somebody else is doing it, in exchange for a government grant or lucrative consulting contracts, or whatever. Let's put it this way: science is value-neutral; it's just knowledge. But technology is something that I do believe should be exercised with a conscience."

Some of the reviews for *Factoring Humanity* (mine included) were keen to remark on its warm Golden Age

feel. This was a deliberate effect that Sawyer set out to achieve.

"Absolutely, but with a specific twist. Two of my favourite writers are Larry Niven and Mike Resnick. They were on a panel together at a convention. Larry said he wrote the kind of science fiction that brought him into the genre 30 years before. Mike said he wrote the kind of science fiction that he himself wanted to read today as a middle-aged man. I wondered if it was possible to do fiction that combined the two: that would be relevant to adults with real-world problems, and still was filled with that old-time sense-of-wonder. So I've set out to capture the spirit of Golden-Age sf, including the mind-blowing ideas and sheer fun of thinking big thoughts, but while at the same time still telling a very human, contemporary story, with sophisticated, multi-levelled characterization."

Part of that Golden Age feel was achieved by having a good ear to the ground, and by knowing what it was that the public wanted at that time. Over the years, this instinct has served him well, although it has also meant (inevitably) that he has had to share some ideas with other people in the field, at approximately the same time. For example, *End of an Era* appeared close to the arrival of *Jurassic Park*, and then others. Did he feel, when he was writing it, that that idea was his and his alone?

"Well, first, I do feel it's necessary to emphasize the differences between *Jurassic Park* and *End of an Era*. *Jurassic Park* is essentially a redoing of Michael Crichton's own 1974 film *Westworld*. It's the story of a scientific amusement park that fails to function properly. In *Westworld*, it was robots that ran amuck; in *Jurassic Park*, it was dinosaurs. The dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* are resurrected in the modern day through cloning. *End of an Era*, on the other hand, is a time-travel novel. It deals with an invasion of Earth by aliens at the end of the Mesozoic, with dinosaurs being observed in their natural habitats, and with an alternative explanation for the extinctions that occurred at the end of the Cretaceous. So, yeah, both books dealt with dinosaurs, but in completely different ways. Did I feel that no one else should be writing about dinosaurs? Not at all; that would be as silly as me saying no one else should be writing about space travel or time travel or genetic engineering. Science fiction has always been about the respectful use of common elements; what's important is what new twist you can put on those elements. I don't begrudge Crichton's use of dinosaurs at all.



"Dinosaurs have been a lifelong interest of mine, and I've actually done four novels about them – *Far-Seer*, *Fossil Hunter*, *Foreigner* and *End of an Era*, plus a bunch of short stories. And the novel I'm just finishing up for Tor, tentatively called *Source Code*, has a paleontologist as a main character. I never completely lose interest in something I've written about, but the interest does wane a bit after I've completed the novel, precisely because I've moved on to something else. When I was doing *Starplex*, I focused on cosmology; while writing *Frameshift*, I was immersed in genetics; when I did *Factoring Humanity*, I buried myself in quantum computing; when I did *Flash-forward*, I was knee-deep in research materials about the nature of time. Being an sf writer is like being a university student who changes his or her major every year; you simply can't specialize in all branches of knowledge – you have to focus.

"Now, obviously, *End of an Era* didn't get the same distribution as *Jurassic Park*, and that's a function of living in the sf ghetto, but every reviewer who compared the two said mine was better. The *Edmonton Journal*, for instance, said, *End of an Era* is 'definitely a better book than *Jurassic Park* – faster paced, avoiding the expository dumps that Crichton uses, and supplying us with much more believable characters.' On a related note, my *Illegal Alien* has been favourably compared to the works of John Grisham, who often shares the bestsellers' lists with Crichton. The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, declared that *Illegal Alien* 'puts John Grisham to shame.' So, actually, the existence of these slick, but not necessarily all that polished, bestselling writers, has been useful to me, in that it invites comparisons that draw in readers who would never have tried pure-product sf otherwise."

Sawyer has been compared with Crichton on several occasions. Is it an accurate, or even flattering, comparison? "The *Montreal Gazette* called me, 'Canada's answer to Michael Crichton,' and another review said I write the way Michael Crichton would, if Crichton could do characterization. The comparison is apt in one way: we both take cutting edge science, and try to spin a real page-turner based on it. But my agent Ralph Vicinanza and I were talking about the comparison a few years ago, and why although many critics think I'm a better writer than Crichton, I don't sell nearly as well. It's the same problem that plagues Gregory Benford, Nancy Kress, and other sf writers who bring thriller elements into their works: we sf writers are pro-science, and Crichton,

at the core, is anti-science. His books are full of characters like Ian Malcolm ominously mumbling that people don't know what their messing with, and smugly strutting as science ends up with egg all over its collective face. Sadly, there will always be a bigger market of people who are afraid of science than of those who welcome and embrace it."

Sawyer seems, of course, to be very prolific; but perhaps this is not quite the case. "I write one book a year; that's not a blistering pace in this era of word processors. But because I've changed publishers a couple of times, and they had radically different lead times from when I finished the manuscript to when the books appeared in stores, I look more prolific than I am. In the UK, New English Library did five books of mine (*End of an Era*, *Far-Seer*, *Fossil Hunter*, *Foreigner* and *The Terminal Experiment*) in a one-year period around 1995, but that represented five years of my writing. And in the U.S., I've had three different books go into mass-market editions in a six-month period – *Frameshift* in November 1998, *Illegal Alien* in January 1999, and *Factoring Humanity* in May 1999, but, again, that represents three years of writing... I treat my writing as a marathon, not a sprint. I work at it five days a week, pacing myself carefully. I've managed to keep up the one-book-a-year pace for a decade now. The process falls into four phases: two to four months of research; two to four months of writing the first draft; four or so months of revising and polishing; and a month or two off between books to do

a little short fiction and to recharge my batteries... I've done a lot of sf/mystery crossovers, and someday I'd like to do a straight, stand-alone mystery novel. I've also got at the back of my mind that I'd like to do a mainstream novel about the American civil-rights movement of the 1960s. Whether I'll ever find time for either, who can say?"

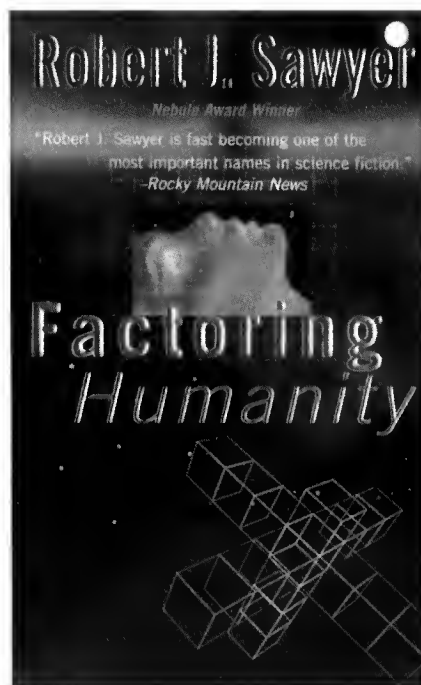
Does he find ideas for novels or do ideas for novels find him? "Definitely the former; I wish I was one of those for whom ideas just popped into their heads, but I really have to rack my brain to develop my ideas, and it takes weeks, sometimes months, to really figure out what a book is going to be about."

He does not believe in the idea of the Creative Muse. "The muse is an excuse writers use; they hoodwink non-writers with it. If they feel like going to a movie or playing tennis instead of writing, they tell people, well, the muse wasn't with me today. If they feel like shutting everyone out and just concentrating on their work, they say, sorry, the muse has struck. It's a deliberate attempt to obfuscate; to make a straightforward process seem mystical, because of the status and power that confers. I've let the cat out of the bag, but there it is: the muse is a lie." And he doesn't use his dreams to build a plot either. "I wish I could. I dream very vividly, and in full colour. But my dreams don't make much rational sense, so I've never been able to steal their plots."

Life has become more stressful for Sawyer since he has earned his success. "Well, I never had any stress when I was just a regular guy. There is some stress with being in the public eye. There are always people who want to take a shot at you, who feel their failure is your fault, simply because you have the success they wanted. And writers' group politics are downright vicious, unlike anything I'd ever encountered in my life prior to becoming a writer. But the joys are greater, too, once you become successful. There's no denying that having money beats not having money. I really do think my life is fantastic these days, even if it does have some stress in it."

Sawyer has also been active in the editing of science fiction, most notably the Canadian *Tesseracts 6* and *Crossing the Lines* projects.

"Editing *Tesseracts 6* came about because the Canadian sf community – fans as well as fellow writers – has been very supportive of me over the years, and I was really looking for ways to pay that community back. I guess I'm lucky enough that my name has developed some commercial





value, and I wanted to use it to help out some other writers. The *Tesseract* anthology series was founded by Judith Merril, and one of its purposes was to find and promote new writing talent in Canada. It's a lot of work to read through submissions for an open anthology, but I felt it was a constructive way in which I could do something positive for Canadian sf...

"The *Tesseract* anthologies always have two editors – a dumb policy, if you ask me, typical of Canadian do-everything-by-committee thinking – and so I originally approached my friend Terence M. Green, the World Fantasy Award-nominated author of *Shadow of Ashland* – to co-edit the book with me. His schedule didn't permit it, but he suggested I do it with my wife, Carolyn Clink, who is an established poet. Well, it had never occurred to either me or Carolyn, but we both knew when Terry suggested it that it was the perfect answer. Tesseract Books was delighted to have us as a team, and we dove in and had a great time doing the work together.

"*Crossing the Line* was different: I was approached by David Skene-Melvin, the former administrator of the Crime Writers of Canada, with the anthology idea. Since so much of my own work was sf/mystery crossovers, it seemed natural to put together an anthology of such fiction. That book was a joy to do: we didn't have to read through slush; we simply picked stories we loved from

already published material. We really wanted that book to be a monument, to show the world just how good the work by Canada's established sf authors is."

To select what was eventually picked for *Tesseract* 6, a good deal of dross had to be waded through. "The quality was mostly appallingly bad, to be blunt. It really was discouraging. I don't think we have any bad stories in *Tesseract* 6. But we published virtually every good story out of the hundreds we received. No one would try to bake a cake without having a good, solid definition in their minds of what a cake is, but it's amazing to me how many people try to write short stories without any idea of what actually constitutes a story, let alone what constitutes proper use of the English language. I used to doubt the horror stories other editors tell at conventions, but after wading through all that awful slush, I doubt them no longer... I look at *Crossing the Line* with enormous affection: it was a joy to edit, and the publisher – Pottersfield Press of Nova Scotia – could not have been more pleasant or professional to deal with. It's also clearly the better-looking of the two books, and the classier physical product. I enormously enjoyed working with Carolyn, but the rest of the process on *Tesseract* 6, I'm afraid, just wasn't as smooth as it could have been. Still, clearly, as an anthology of all-original work, *Tesseract* 6 is the more important of the

two books... The reviews for both books have been overwhelmingly positive both inside and outside of Canada, which actually came as a pleasant surprise. I've always thought I had rather singular tastes in fiction, so I'm pleased to see that stories I love are being appreciated by other people...

"I'm actually co-editing a third anthology – a collection of straight mystery stories by members of the Crime Writers of Canada – but, no, I've done my bit now for King and Country. Although editing has its rewards – particularly when you discover great new talents, as we did with Nalo Hopkinson, Doug Smith, and some others – it just doesn't pay well enough to compensate for all the work it takes."

So what does he think are the strengths and weaknesses peculiar to Canadian writing? "Robert Runte, a Canadian academic, likes to quip that American sf has happy endings, Canadian sf has sad endings, and British sf has no endings at all. That's obviously a vast oversimplification, but I do think that one of the greatest strengths of Canadian writing, particularly in sf, is a willingness to have main characters who are not heroes in the traditional American sense. David G. Hartwell, my editor at Tor, and the single most influential sf book editor of the last few decades, says that mainstream fiction is about the interior lives of ordinary people, and sf is about the exterior lives of extraordinary people. I think he's right in relation to American sf, but I really do believe that the best of Canadian sf is just as much about the interior lives of ordinary people as is the best of mainstream literature. Americans have a space programme, and so maybe it makes sense for them to explore outer space; we Canadians don't, and so perhaps it's natural that we've turned to inner space, just as the Brits did with the New Wave."

Until fairly recently, Sawyer was also the President of the Science Fiction Writers of America, the first non-American to hold the post. Unfortunately, in his opinion, "SFWA politics have gotten very nasty over the years; a few years ago, the wife of a then-candidate for SFWA president phoned me in tears over the unfairness of the attacks engineered against her husband by his opponent and his opponent's spouse. Indeed, past SFWA president Norman Spinrad has characterized the current state of SFWA politics as 'strident, vicious, political factions, fighting among each other and undermining elected officers, not primarily over serious matters of policy, but merely, like inner-city gangs

Robert J. Sawyer (right) with Stephen Baxter during the 1999 science fiction WorldCon, "Aussiecon," in Melbourne.



wielding electronic Glocks and straight-razors and high on nerdish crack, over status and turf and abuse personal vendettas.'

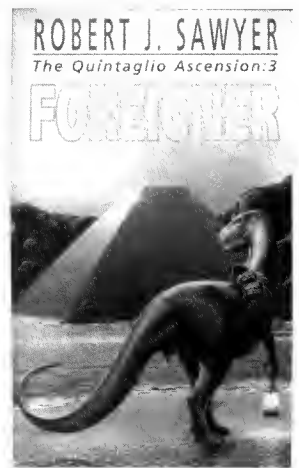
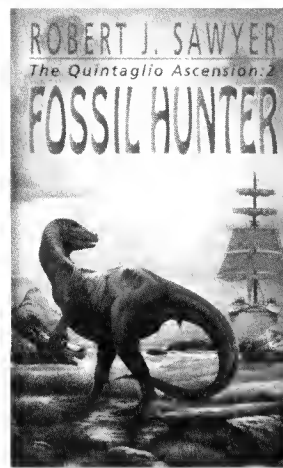
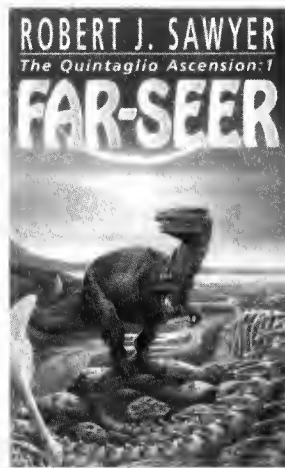
"When I came to office, one past president told me that he'd written a letter every 18 hours on average during his presidency. He said that as if it were a lot, but he'd been president before there was an online world, and that pace is nothing compared to what the online community demands of you. They want 100% of your attention, 100% of the time. Being SFWA president, a non-paying position, became my full-time job for six months. I simply couldn't afford to lose a full year of writing; I've got a living to make. And so I stepped down.

"Those rabble-rousers who have inflated SFWA politics into a full-time pursuit have, in my opinion, damaged SFWA beyond repair. After my experience – as well as that of Bram Stoker Award-winner Edo van Belkom and Hugo Award-winner Allen M. Steele, both of whom also resigned from SFWA's Board of Directors in the last four months – it seems clear that no full-time writer of any stature will ever run for SFWA office again. Indeed, SFWA's nine-person Board now has only three people on it who have ever published a novel, and only one of those writes full-time."

For Robert J. Sawyer, science fiction began when he was a child.

"In 1963, when I was three years old, Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's Supermarionation series *Fireball XL5* was shown in Canada for the first time, and I fell absolutely in love with it. Actually, after 30 years of it not being on the air in Canada, it's back again, but at the crazy time of 4 a.m., and I still love it, silly as it is. I also loved *Star Trek* when I first saw it, in 1968. My older brother gave me a novel by Alan E. Nourse around about 1970 called *Trouble on Titan*, which was my first written sf. And then I dived into Asimov and Clarke, and the rest was history. Right from the beginning, I knew I wanted to write the stuff myself."

He is a fan, but sf is not a religion for him, as it is for some, although he admits: "I'm an sf evangelist in that I want people who don't normally read sf to try my books, and I do write them with a wide audience in mind. But that's a key distinction: I'm not forcing Larry Niven or Isaac Asimov into the hands of those who have only ever enjoyed mainstream writers; I realize that sf has had a distinct literary tradition, but that it has set up many barriers of vocabulary and style that keep new readers out. So, in



some sense, I'm trying to make my work something separate from the religion of sf – less of a mystery to outsiders. On the other hand, the rational worldview – the belief that the scientific method is the best tool for answering any question, up to and including is there a god? – is certainly something I hold dear, and I promote that in my novels."

I ask him if he would be able to sit an exam paper on his own work. He replies, "Good question! I'm sometimes frightened by how well my fans, especially the ones who love the Quintaglio trilogy (*Far-Seer*, *Fossil Hunter*, *Foreigner*), know the details of my work – they remember things that were mentioned just once, like the name of the astronomy student who preceded Afsan as Saleed's apprentice. If the questions were thematic ones – compare and contrast the treatment of family relationships in Sawyer's novels – I'd do fine. If they amounted to trivia question, nope, sorry, I'd probably fail. It actually frustrates readers sometimes: they meet me at conventions and ask me questions about the book they've just read – but I haven't read that book for five years. The details are fresher in their minds than they are in mine. Ironically, though, I'm quite a demon at classic *Star Trek* trivia: I can tell you the name of Jim Kirk's brother but not the name of Peter Hobson's brother."

He agrees that sf is as ghettoized as it ever was, and has a few ideas for how matters might be improved. "First, ditch the mimetic covers – the cover art that imitates a scene from the novel. It's a turn-off for serious readers. Second, the authors have to stand up for the art form. If you're low on cash, take a job flipping burgers – but don't write a *Xena: Warrior Princess* or *Star Wars* novel, and don't do false collaborations with bigger-name writers. Every time one of us writers decides that we're just in it for the money, we drive another nail in the coffin of the art form... Georges

Clemenceau said war is too important to be left to the generals. Well, sf is too important to be left to the die-hard fans. It has to be widely read if it's going to help shape the future; we writers should be doing everything in our power to make sure that our work is seen by people of all types. And sf readers have a role to play, too. Give appropriate sf books – not some *Star Trek* piece of crap, but a serious, thoughtful sf novel – to non-sf readers for Christmas; do what you can to bring them into the fold."

One reviewer (from the *Toronto Star*) praised Sawyer with the following words: "Here, at last, is an ambitious attempt to exploit the possibilities that the science-fiction genre is capable of." Whereas such a notice might have delighted many writers, Sawyer is cool and a little sceptical, saying: "I really do try to ignore reviews, good or bad. A novel is like a Rorschach test: a response to it tells you something about the person making the response, but very little about the work in question. Of course, review excerpts are a marketing tool, and so it's certainly worthwhile to keep one's eyes open for good ones. But I don't think good reviews validate the work, and I don't think bad reviews detract from it. A variety of reactions is to be expected to anything that isn't bland – and the last thing I want my work to be is bland. As to whether I was trying to exploit the possibilities that sf is capable of, oh, absolutely, yes. I am sick to death, and, frankly, embarrassed to be associated with, mindless space opera, or military-sf war porn. I do think hard sf, when done well, can be enormously powerful, and I was definitely trying to bring my entire creative arsenal to bear on the problem of writing a hard sf novel that would actually have something meaningful to say about what it means to be human, and about humanity's place in the universe."

# Shaping Up

*Helen Patrice*

Emily always felt best near the end of the aerobics classes. Her mind became clear, free of the endless, pitiful voices. It was neither schizophrenia, nor paranoia, just the constant chatter of the people and animals who depended on her, all calling for her help. Unless she shaped up, she could not support them. She loved them, but sometimes they made her feel very, very tired. Without aerobics she would not stay in shape, and unless she was in shape her dependents would perish.

Her instructor entered the changing rooms as she was pulling on her track suit.

"I got the job at the vet clinic," Emily announced.

"Oh, so you'll be switching to night classes?" asked the instructor.

"No, I'm on the night shift. I'll still be free during the day – if I'm awake."

"It doesn't sound like a great social life."

"I don't mind. They want someone who can cope with sick and injured animals at odd hours. I suppose it was the animal refuge in my back yard that proved I was the right person for the job. Besides, I'm always down at the clinic with some sick animal anyway."

"That's true, Em. You really have a weakness for pathetic creatures."

"Creatures in need," she retorted indignantly.

"Some of them create that need. Shall I name names?"

Emily looked away. The creature about to be named was her husband.

"Des goes to Weight Watchers, he never misses their monthly camps. He comes home, well, a lot lighter each time."

The instructor snorted and began to strip. "And he's more than replaced it by the next camp. I saw him just the other day. He's thirty pounds heavier than when I first met you."

Emily zipped up the tracksuit top as her instructor stepped into the shower. "He just needs time. It's been difficult for him."

Through the running water she heard "ten years," "lard arse" and "give me one month and I'll shape him up."

Emily was jogging home when she saw the dead ring-tail possum in the gutter. The body was not crushed, so it was worth checking. Only in Australia would anyone be feeling up the roadkill, she thought as she checked the pouch. Something sucked at her finger, and she drew the feeble, furry bundle out. The baby was the size of a large mouse.

"Hullo there, I'm your new mother now," she announced gently as she lowered it into the warmth of her cleavage.

As Emily turned into her street she saw the pizza



delivery van parked in front of her house.

"Hi, just in time for dinner," said the smiling, uniformed youth brightly as they passed in the driveway. "You've got the Supreme Special: free garlic bread, Coke and dessert."

Emily trudged into the house. Des had hidden his feast under their bed by the time she entered, but the succulent smell was strong on the air.

"How could you do this?" she demanded. "Your Weight Watchers camp starts tonight, but you're hogging down more gunge than I'd eat in a month."

Des twisted his thick white hands in front of his ample stomach. "You don't understand."

"You bet I don't. Explain it to me. Again."

"You *couldn't* understand. You've never had to cope with being like me. I have overactive glands, you know. And I have to see you every day. When you stretch, your ribs stick out. Think how that makes me feel."

"Hungry," she said, striding across to the bed. She reached for the pizza carton and drew it out.

"That cost twenty dollars," Des whined.

"Twenty of *my* dollars, Des."

"Oh, that's right, rub it in. It's not my fault I can't get a job. People are so *so* shapist!"

He managed a tiny sob, but Emily still kept the box from him.

"By the way, thanks for asking but I got the job at the vet clinic. I'll be working the night shifts, so you'll have to look after your own dinners from now on. I'm sure you can manage that."

At the back of the house she began to feed the baby possum with an eyedropper.

"You know what I like about you?" she said. "Eventually you'll grow up, shape up, and vanish out of my life up a gum tree. Des will always be that shape."

Des must have thought that Emily's night shift lasted all night – sunset to sunrise – but the hours were actually 7.30pm to 7.30am. She was half-doing in the lounge room, curled up in a chair, when she heard him approaching along the hallway. Only the kitchen light was on, and the sky outside was darkening. He did not notice her as he passed. Probably going to fish the pizza out of the garbage bin she thought, past caring as she closed her eyes.

An odd hissing began, a hissing that grew in intensity, underlaid by a guttural groaning. Emily bounded to her feet and sprang to the door. Steam was billowing out of the laundry. By the light from the kitchen she could just see Des on all fours, naked and apparently being sick. Food poisoning, she thought, then she noticed that *he* was the source of the steam.

Emily could not move. Her husband was not sick, he was... her imagination failed her. She watched for a minute, then another. The steam began to disperse. A large, obese dog lay panting on the laundry floor. A werewolf? Emily gripped the door frame, her legs like rubber. A real... well, a were-labrador, in fact, but a genuine shapeshifter nonetheless. Des ponderously got to his feet, nosed the dog flap open and slipped out into the night. Like most apathetic dogs, he didn't bother to sniff the air. Emily was suddenly thankful she never wore perfume.

Breaking out of her trance, Emily dashed to the front of the house and opened the door in time to see her transformed husband struggle over the low gate and waddle off down the street. Almost without thinking about what she was doing, she pocketed her keys and began to follow.

She blended well with the shadows cast by the streetlights and full moon, still clad in her dark blue tracksuit and black trainers. Des made for a fast food outlet, where he knocked over several garbage bins and bolted down the scraps, even the pickles no one ever wanted. He left after the shift manager came out and turned a hose on him. Next he tried a burger store's bins, tackled a fried chicken drive-in, and then another pizza place.

For the shapeshifted Des, cat chasing was apparently more important than cat catching. He chased several, all of which loped away at an easy pace, flirting their tails as he lumbered after them. A number of dogs confronted him over territorial incursions, but his sheer size intimidated most. Must think he'll sit on them, thought Emily in wonder. The last dog was lean, fast and aggressive, however, and somewhat more perceptive: it could distinguish sheer size from proficiency in canine martial arts. Charging, it shouldered Des off his feet, then delivered a warning nip to his hind leg. His subsequent flight was the only time that night when Emily was hard pressed to keep up with the were-hound.

Emily was wary of following Des into the park, but the strangeness of the situation smothered her fears. Avoiding the people who were exchanging packages and looking furtive, she kept to the shadows, noting that other large dogs seemed also to be converging and milling about in the bright moonlight. She watched from behind a tree as a complex ritual of tail sniffing and posturing was enacted. Are these *all* shapeshifters? Emily wondered. Somehow their behaviour seemed too structured to be truly canine.

When the act of betrayal began she was caught so totally by surprise that she just stared without comprehending. It was the unmistakable form of Des arched over another labrador, holding tightly with his forelegs and thrusting as vigorously as his form would allow. Emily flushed hot, shivered, ground her teeth – then barely restrained herself from charging in and kicking them apart. She clung to her tree for support, feeling weak and nauseous.

She seemed to come to her senses some minutes later, as she was shambling listlessly away. Drab shadows with eager voices offered her "clean flour," "goods" and a "new gear" before she meandered back onto the street. Hailing a taxi, she arrived at the clinic at 7.29 pm.

"Cutting it fine, Emily," said the vet as she entered. "7.30 means in uniform, ready for starting."

"Sorry Eric. I'll remember that."

All through that night the moonlit images kept returning to Emily. Hurt animals and the blur of owners' anxious faces were only prickles of distraction. She was married to a shapeshifter. Sharp teeth, claws. She was in danger. "All the better to eat you with." A werewolf? She shivered as snowflakes of fear caressed her. A were-

wolf who was screwing around. Outrage blazed up, melting the snowflakes. And with a shapeshifted woman or a real bitch? She thought of him bent over her, and perhaps a different one each month. Then he would come home to Emily – and order pizza! A were-labrador, how very Australian. A half-hysterical giggle escaped her. The woman filling out forms at the counter glared. How could her beloved Pussenkitten's constipation be funny?

Emily swallowed hard and tidied the waiting room. Des had gone at that female thing with much more enthusiasm than he'd ever shown her. His love-making, when he could get it up at all, was quiet and languorous, with barely a beginning and almost never had a proper finish – for her. When they decided to marry she had been more plump and amiable. Des needed her help, and she had needed marriage to feel complete, but unlike the other creatures who passed through her backyard refuge, he never shaped up and became independent.

"I need you so badly," he would plead, squeezing her hand tightly when once again sex had fizzled into impotence. "Don't leave me, Emily. I love you. You make me feel like a whole man."

But who needed to feel like a man when he could feel like a dog, run naked through the darkened streets, pee anywhere, and mate with whoever took his fancy?

All this time she'd supported him, "just while I get my life on track." Ten years of waiting for him to lose weight, gain ambition, put the TV remote down, get his pecker up. The list was endless. All the while she had rejected other men's compliments, suggestions, and even outright propositions. Years of substituting aerobics for sex had given her quite a stunning figure, she realised as she struck poses before a mirror.

"Eric, you're from Poland," said Emily as she and the vet sipped coffee together around midnight.

"That is so. Had clinic with wife. Had divorce. Wife got clinic."

"I'm sorry."

"Hah. Australia is better. Animals and pets more interesting, and, ah independent. People coddle pets too much in Poland. Boring place."

"Really? I thought Poland was full of interesting mythical animals, like werewolves."

As a leading question it was fairly pathetic, but Eric took it as a joke and laughed.

"Have never treated one."

Not that you were aware of, she thought. "Do you believe in them?" she asked instead.

"In Central Europe are... strange things. Maybe people with leprosy lose fingers and toes, seem to have wolf paws. I think there could be virus, virus that change DNA in cells. Werewolf bites you, virus infects you. Maybe full moon triggers virus. If you are fat, you can shapeshift. Is my theory?"

"Why fat?"

"Fat stores energy. Candles are fat. Explosives are fat. Fat fuels shapeshifting act. Squeeze out water, burn fat: poof, werewolf."

"Fat," she echoed, a dangerous edge on her voice. "And the silver bullets to kill them?"

"Who knows? You bring werewolf, we experiment. Yes?"

"How can I find out more?"

"Read folklore, perhaps. In library, on Internet. Use computer on the front desk, now. Just stop when customers come, yes?"

Emily squeezed her cup tightly in both hands. "You're very generous, Eric. I must sound like a nut."

"All interesting people are nuts. Maybe I am hiring you for same reason. Yes?"

"And I thought it was for my way with animals."

His eyes met hers over the rim of his cup. "Woof," he ventured.

She drew breath for her standard rebuttal under such circumstances, but the image of Des and... the other werewolf flashed behind her eyes. Is there another werewolf, dear? Suddenly Emily was the most dangerous creature on earth: a caring, patient person pushed too far. She smiled warmly at Eric, and hesitantly reached out a hand.

"Good boy," she bantered. "Good dog."

As Eric licked the back of her hand, she felt her heart pound alarmingly and was almost convulsed by an achingly sweet rush of hormones. It was the most erotic moment she'd had in... well, ever.

The next day she marched into a jeweller's shop on the stroke of 9am. The jeweller scratched his head as she confronted him with a set of drawings and a large antique silver bowl that had belonged to her grandmother.

"Can you make these from this?" she asked tersely.

"Turn this bowl into a scalpel, darts, and a needle?" "Yes."

"I – I can do it, but it's unfamiliar work. Perhaps a thousand dollars in labour –"

"Done. When will they be finished?"

"Ah, six weeks, maybe seven."

"Another thousand to do them in three."

"Done!"

Three weeks passed. By now Emily's aerobics instructor was not so much annoyed that she had abandoned aerobics classes as alarmed by the fanatical intensity with which she now worked in the weights room.

"If you work too hard every day you will just burn muscle instead of putting on size," she said as Emily strained within the bench press machine.

"I want strength, and quickly!" Emily replied between gritted teeth.

"For what? To lift Des?"

"Maybe."

"You're joking!"

"Maybe."

"Okay, none of my business, but just work alternate muscle groups. Shoulders and chest one day, back and biceps the next. I'll do a programme for you."

Emily lowered the handle and sat up. "That would be great. Any other tips?"

"Go on a protein and fibre diet, feed your muscles as they grow."

On the day of the next full moon a fairground attendant put his hands on his hips and sighed with exasperation as Emily bought yet another roll of tickets for the shooting gallery.

"Lady, you've won seven teddy bears, eleven dolls and 33 plastic dinosaurs. Don't you want to go on the rides, or something?"

She hefted the air gun and squinted down the sights at the rows of targets.

"I'm having plenty of fun here," she replied in a cold, level voice.

"You practising to join the Army, or something?"

"Just having fun."

Emily was eating her dinner of sardines, brown rice and olive oil when the front doorbell sounded. Even though the bedroom was closer, she still reached it before Des was able to get out of bed.

"Family size pizza with the lot, and cola six-pack," announced the youth who stood smiling before her.

She stood in silence as Des pushed past her, paid, and took the carton back to the bedroom. She followed him.

"I thought you were weaning yourself onto small vegetarian pizzas?" she asked as he opened the box.

"Well, ah, my sponsor says you can give yourself a little reward whenever you make progress."

"I see." She didn't, but deliberately lightened her tone. "Does your camp start tonight?"

"Uh-huh. I hate to be away from you, darling, but they do help me get into better shape."

Emily nodded in agreement. His were-shape was indeed a considerable improvement. She glanced at her watch.

"Well, the animals are fed, and I think I'll jog to the clinic this evening. Don't do anything I wouldn't." Grabbing her mobile phone, she clipped it to her belt and left. She jogged around the block and phoned the clinic.

"Hi, Eric? It's Em. I won't be in tonight. Things are pretty heavy at home. Yeah, I know, I miss you too. Woof, woof!"

Returning home, she climbed in through the open window of the spare bedroom. She could hear Des eating the last of his pizza as she took the rifle from its hiding place and released the safety catch. It had been easy enough to borrow the gun Eric kept locked away, the one he used to put down or tranquillize large animals.

"You are shooting husband, yes?" he joked as he handed it to her.

If only you knew, she thought as she left.

There was a hollow plop of a carton hitting the bedroom floor and an empty clatter as a cola can followed it. Emily glanced at her watch, grinning with satisfaction. She knew precisely how long it took Des to eat a family size pizza, almost to the second.

The floorboards creaked as he walked down the passage. She watched as he passed, noting that he was wearing only his jocks and socks. Not a pretty sight, even at the best of times. In the laundry, a bare globe shone on his pallid body, shading black in the many creases and folds. Emily stole up the passage and crouched behind the sideboard, holding the rifle. She

glanced at her watch. According to the times in the newspaper, this was the very minute of sunset.

Des gave something between a groan and a growl, then dropped to all fours as steam billowed from his skin. Neighbours' dogs started to bark, sensing that something strange was nearby. The transformation was complete within five minutes or so. She had not seen the reverse process, but the level of her pond for injured ducks had been suddenly lower the day that he had returned home. Without turning he shook off the underwear and socks and waddled in the direction of the dog flap. Emily raised the rifle and took aim. Des pushed against the flap, then noticed it had been bolted shut. As he scrambled at the bolt with his paw, she squeezed the trigger.

With a loud yelp Des began to dance in circles, snapping at the silver tranquilliser dart embedded in his rump. After only seconds he became unsteady, then tottered and fell. Emily loaded another dart and cautiously moved forward. He was conscious enough to snap feebly at her hand, but she easily slipped the designer silver muzzle onto him. He was unconscious as she bound his forelegs using black leather straps with silver buckles that she had bought in a sex shop. She uncorked a bottle of brandy, gulped two mouthfuls, then spread Des' hind legs and poured a liberal measure between them.

A month of assisting Eric with operations had taught her some basics of surgery. The silver scalpel sliced smoothly through the skin of Des's canine scrotum. The cotton wadding soaked up the blood as Emily lifted the first testicle in her forceps. It was pinkish white, and smaller than she had expected. She cut the thin vas deferens, severing that final connection with Des, then dropped it into a jam jar of brandy. She repeated the process for the left testicle, then slowly and carefully sewed up the incision using her silver needle.

For a long time Emily lay slumped against the laundry wall, shocked by what she had done. She examined the two pale testicles in the jar, giggled, tried to stand, failed, and slumped against the wall again. Now she felt ill. Before her was her unconscious, shapeshifted husband surrounded by the gun, darts, bloody cotton, silver instruments, and French brandy that had effected his second, unexpected transformation for the evening.

At last Emily pushed herself to her feet and began to clean up. Into the fire went everything that could be burned, then she boiled the silver instruments on the stove. She rolled Des onto a mat, dragged him to the kitchen and chained him to the sideboard with a silver choker bought at Cultured Critters. She left him a bowl of water and a litter tray. He was awake by the time she started sorting out his clothes.

"It's the front door for you tomorrow," she said as she packed his belongings into plastic bags. "Ten years! What a bloody waste!"

She flung one of his shoes at him and he was not sufficiently agile to dodge. It hit him square between the eyes. He hid behind the sideboard as Emily stormed off to strip the bed. Returning, she threw the sheets into the washing machine, added bleach and set it to "Hot Wash." His favourite shoes she took out and offered to

the dogs in her refuge – who attacked them with curious relish. By midnight the bedroom had been transformed, with even the bed residing in a different corner. Incense was burning on the dressing table to purge the smell of Des's last pizza.

Emily sat down at the kitchen table, poured herself a large glass of brandy, clinked the glass against the jar containing Des's testicles, and said, "Cheers. Here's looking at you, pig."

Des cowered beside the sideboard.

"Do you know why I did it, Des?" she asked as she poured another glass. "I did it to remove you from the gene pool of humanity. It was not about you being a werewolf, or even you rogering those other – whatever they were. It was because you're a slob. A wereslob! You disgust me. You tricked me into being your unpaid slave and you played on my good nature. You can drink with that muzzle on, by the way, but if you dare piss anywhere but in the tray you'll go outside. Oh, and I wouldn't try to lick where your balls used to be." She clinked her glass against the jar again. "It may sting."

Emily dozed for some hours, then was jolted awake by the alarm clock. 7am, and the winter dawn was not far off. The kitchen windows faced east. The newspaper said that sunrise was 7.10. After filling several buckets with water and putting them beside the sideboard she removed the silver muzzle from Des and stood back.

"Time to transform," she decreed, and Des began drinking from one of the buckets. At 7.10 it was half empty. He stopped drinking. It was the moment of dawn.

Nothing happened.

Another minute passed, then another. Worried, she turned on the radio. After what seemed an age, the announcer declared it to be 7.16. At 7.20 a shard of sunlight came through the window and glowed warmly on the canine form of her husband. He blinked his doggy eyes, shuffled to the litter tray and began to piss, whining with the pain.

Now in a blind panic, Emily phoned the clinic.

"Eric, it's me, Emily. I know you're about to go home, but can you come around to my place on the way? I don't know who else to call. 14 Haldan Drive, yes, that's it."

The bewildered Des watched as she raced to hide his bags of clothes. He yelped as she decanted the jam jar into the grate, and the embers flared up with a whoosh as the brandy burned. Finally she stripped off her own bloody clothes and tossed them into the washing machine, dashed for the shower and began to scrub herself frantically.

The intense needles of hot water pounded her skin until she relaxed and began to think more clearly. Castrating Des while he was shapeshifted had obviously affected his ability to change back. Perhaps lycanthropy was partly hormonal, linking with the Moon the way a woman's menses did. Alter a woman's hormonal balance and she could no longer ovulate. Remove a werewolf's testes and it obviously lost more than its reproductive ability. What a discovery, what a triumph for Australian medical research. Maybe she could publish a paper on it. Dream on.

The police! The thought stabbed at Emily like the sil-

ver scalpel as she dried herself. This was not Central Europe, and Australian police would be less than understanding if she told the truth. Des was a missing person, and... so what? She would call the police in a few days, saying that he'd left after an argument and that she was getting worried. There were no complications or witnesses.

The front doorbell rang as she was tying the cord of her dressing gown. Eric! Now there was a witness. She walked to the front door, thinking quickly, frantically and laterally.

Eric strode in with his kit as she opened the door.

"What is emergency?" he asked. "Sounding frightened, you were."

"Des and I had a row, it was such a shock," she said as she walked him to the kitchen. "I told him to go, and he just walked out."

"He can walk?" asked Eric, displaying no discretion.

Emily took the cue. "It was over some bitch he's been seeing. I – er – went to follow him – I don't know why – but he caught a taxi. I found this fellow on the way home." She gestured to the dog still chained to the sideboard. "He's been castrated recently, but the stitches are pretty rough looking." Emily ventured a helpless smile. "I just wanted to make sure he was okay, poor old thing."

Eric narrowed his eyes. "Am thinking you just want Eric to be visiting 14 Haldan Drive. Yes?"

She arched an eyebrow. Eric approached Des, who growled uneasily.

"There, there, woofers, no hurtings."

Des could do little but listlessly submit. The tranquillizer was still in his blood.

"Fancy muzzle for dumped doggy. I'm thinking you were loved once, yes? What happened, eh? Too much eating?" He stood up and went to the laundry to wash. "Is fine. Competent amateur has done work, but he needs losing of lot more weight for being healthy. You are keeping him, yes?"

Emily shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe, if he behaves. A girl needs company."

"Company? Husband not returning?"

"I told him to shape up or ship out. He couldn't shape up."

She put her hands beneath his chin and kissed him delicately on the lips.

"Ah, so *this* is emergency," he said gently. "Company needed, I can provide. Bed only required. Like Winston Churchill saying once: 'Give me tools, I do job.'"

Emily laughed, but took his arm as he tried to lead her away. "I'd prefer the kitchen table first, it reminds me of our times on the clinic's operating table."

They giggled, then embraced. Looking down over Emily's shoulder Eric caught sight of the corpulent stray chained to the sideboard. The dog was whining softly, and the vet had an odd fancy that there was something akin to reproach in its brown, dewy eyes.

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**Helen Patrice** is a relatively new Australian writer whose previous work – "in Australian newspapers, literary magazines, and places such as *Aurealis*, *Starlog* and *For Out*; also, humorous articles on parenting for *Mother and Baby*" – has appeared under the name Helen Sargeant.



**T**he *13th Warrior* is God's revenge on Hollywood for its hell-bent insistence on filming Michael Crichton's laundry lists. By now all the Midas man's cinematic novels (bar the fallen-through *Airframe*) have been snapped up, leaving some pretty maggoty stuff at the bottom of the bin to be picked over by those who know no better. That's not to say that *Eaters of the Dead* (1976) is substandard; it's actually one of his more interesting and adventurous (and slim), a rare venture into historical fantasy, but tanked up on the usual Crichton cocktail of meticulous factual research laced with barking didacticism and come-off-it speculation in tin-eared dumpbin prose. The trouble is, it's a joke novel, a literary *jeu d'esprit* born of a dare, in which Crichton does his unconvincing best to sound not like himself at all but like the tenth-century Bagdad travel writer whose authentic words he stitches into his narrative. The twist in the epic saga of this weird, *Postman*-like folly's passage into being is that it's ended up as Hollywood's first-ever Original Novelist's Cut of a film version written and directed by other people – after credited director John McTiernan fell out with xprod Crichton and walked to do *The Thomas Crown Affair* instead, leaving Crichton himself to unfold his director's chair for extensive reshoots that pushed the budget into legend and the release nearly two years past schedule.

Surprisingly for such an author's cut, a principal casualty of the film translation has been the point. This must be the first film of an sf novel where not only all the overt sf but the entire premise has vanished down the cracks in the cutting-suite lino. Helpful press notes are the only surviving clue that the plot is supposed to be the true history of Beowulf – which in the novel is fascinatingly rationalized and refantasized, four years before *Cave Bear*, as riotous crypto-anthropology, with Grendel and mum leaders of an underground tribe of goddess-worshipping, species-crossdressing psychotic cannibal Neanderthals surviving to medieval times in the caves of southern Sweden. In the event, though, even the novel got more excited about riffing preposterously around the unpromising Herodotean travelogue of diplomat and Viking contactee Ahmad ibn-Fadlan, finessing chronology mightily in downdating the epic a couple of centuries to fit, and making mischief with an Islamic/pagan vantage on history that marginalizes the Christian west altogether. And in the film, this shift is complete, with only a handful of names and some con-

trived rationalizing of dragons to tip the wink about what we're really watching.

It's hard to gauge how closely this rescue cut resembles the film originally intended, though there are plentiful glimpses of cutting-room carnage in things like the second-credited but barely-glimpsed Diane Venora character. Nevertheless, it's all rather wonderful in its mad-*Postman* way, notwithstanding a distinct feeling at the end of "What did we just watch?" The look and mood are potently convincing; the no-star, no-American, largely non-Anglophone casting pays off brilliantly; and most of the action set-pieces are pretty stunning. It's long been a problem with medieval fantasy films that they have to live with being the butt of the funniest film of all time, and it's enormously to *Warrior*'s credit that thoughts of Python, or indeed of Kirk Douglas and Janet Leigh, are almost entirely banished. Instead, the film that seems to have been compulsorily assigned to cast and crew is Vincent Ward's *The Navigator*, of which some scenes come close to bare-faced knock-off. ("How deep in the earth are we?" asks one of our heroes during the great cave descent. "Deep enough to fall out the bottom," quips his mate. Viewers may be prompted to reflect on other things that fall out of bottoms here, but by this point both film and audience are way past telling the difference.)

Where it does sputter badly is in narrative – less from anything seriously awry with the pacing than because of the uneasy accommodation sought between novelistic and cinematic narrative values. There are just too many antechambers to the plot, too many layers of flooring to be installed before the clean simplicities of Hollywood blockbuster plotting can move in: Ahmad's exile, his epic journey to the Volga, the introduction to Viking society, the convolutions of Buliwyf's clan politics, the journey to Scandinavia, and the nature of the ancient evil against which our baker's dozen of Geatish samurai are summoned. In the novel, Crichton relished his hero's marginal role in the narrative: the culture-clash between cultivated Arab intellectual and a barbarian society that seems at first the antithesis of all his values, but which gradually seduces his respect and understanding; his stance as observer and chronicler of another man's tale whose significance is more evident to his readers than it is to him. In the film, though, Antonio Banderas is the star, and has to find star-like things to do, without actually treading on the toes of Vladimir Kulich's "Buliwyf" as the true epic

# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe



hero. It's an impossible brief, and it's depressing to see the climax succumb to the kind of desperate sympathetic plot magic practised only in the movies, under which if you just take out the leader the entire besieging army of unstoppable berserker necrophages will quite literally just fall over. For a film whose *raison d'être* is a sense of daring cultural estrangement, this final capitulation to the crassest of Hollywood narrative architecture is a dispiriting surrender.

Concession to formula is perhaps the one culpable mistake of the summer's most adventurous excursion into parahistory, the scarcely less disastrously-received *Wild Wild West*. *West* took a terrible pummeling from critics and public alike, and even allowing that it perhaps seems fresher to UK eyes, to whom the original series never aired, it's a little hard to see why it should have had quite such a lead-airship launch. In another 1999, there's a film identical to this one in every frame that differs only in that it works; and sf people, at least, seem better attuned to its astute and, for Hollywood, pioneering sense of authentic steampunk genre, a genre arguably invented by the 1960s TV series the *West* movie overwrites, with its campy miscegenation of Jules Verne, *Avengers*-style stunt plotting, 60s spy movie, and TV serial western. Full of genuinely brilliant strokes of period-nonsense extrapolation, like the projection of a corpse's last vision from the eyeballs of his electrically-stimulated severed head, it's a film that makes amply up for any mild irritation with cast, dialogue and plotting by the sheer richness of throw-away invention and the complexity of sustaining ideas.

WWW has a deft, at times dizzying, sense of postmodern parahistory, mixing close-to-bone historical satire with 1776 and *All That* garbledygoon and freewheeling counterfactual nuttiness, all within the framework of a 90s movie remake of a 60s TV take on a Hollywood myth of America's true history. But a much lower-risk movie could have been made from the same materials. There's a real edge of daring and darkness to the risky knock-about gags on abolition and civil-rights anachronisms: the comedy lynching, the persistent credibility problems of a Will Smith hero even in this ironic paracosm of 1869, the (admittedly strained) bantering of racial and disability gibes between Smith and the legless Loveless. Above all, though, it has a genuinely sophisticated sense of alternative history and the counterfactual pathways radiating out from its facile, spectacle-driven stunt-plot. At issue, millennially enough, is the birth of the technology-driven 20th century through the adoption of new modes of warfare. Branagh's master plan of creating an alternate history and geography for the former US is tied to his invention of tank warfare a generation early, making the infantry armies of North and South obsolete overnight in a pre-emptive implementation of the lessons of WWI.

All this contrasts, with calculated uncomfortableness, against the 1960s-innocent technophilia of Kevin

Kline's absurd Vernean inventor, and makes for a considerably darker and more intelligent fantasy than a film this silly has any right to be. Though it's hard to be more than lukewarm about the characters, I still can't think of a film in recent years I'm sorrier won't have a sequel. Few sf films in recent summers have been so prodigal with good ideas, or so little thanked for it.

Instead, for good or evil, we will have more *Austin Powers* films. I have to say I sat pretty stone-faced through *The Spy Who Shagged Me*, though I suppose congratulations are due to such a left-field project for working the system so adroitly and squeezing its puerile double entendres into what it would doubtless call the coveted no. 2 slot. It clearly has mojo, or what another film might call a high midichlorean count; but in a summer of far more interesting historical thought-rumps, *Austin*'s success is a telling tale of the state of film at the end of time. A slight, whimsical sequel to an ever slighter original, it owes most of its success and its very existence to some extremely astute analysis of what happens to "cult" movies in the post-release phase of their lifecycle. Mike Myers's team have learned a lot from what happened with the original *Austin* – so-so in theatres, huge on video – and have tailored their product to match. There's more screen time for Dr Evil (funnier than Austin, though frankly so is a poke in the third eye with a cattle-prod); more blink-and-miss-it references to other movies, of the kind that invites serial rewinding from the sofa with a sociable six-pack; more saturation PR, of a kind that inspires some respect for Myers's sheer dedication and hard work in getting content-free interviews in every publication on the stand.

There isn't much of a film in *Austin 2* at all, though what there is does attempt some reasonably unstupid if low-aiming kinds of ironic juxtaposition between 69 and 99 (or single-quotes and close-double-quotes, as it would probably be more pomo-C to call them) – between millennium's eve now and the eve of loss of

innocence then. The heroes of the 1960s spy movies, to whom *Wild Wild West* owes much of its own bottled mojo, were a striking and bizarre symbiosis of the nuclear and sexual politics of the day: cold-war sex warriors for whom penetration of the iron curtain and of beehived starlets were mysteriously intertwined. But whereas in *West* even the near-pointless Salma Hayek character wrests some shreds of dignity back from her bum-flashing non-role with the final emancipant twist, Austin rides on nostalgia for an age when it was still possible to raise no eyebrows with the presumption that all women are gagging for a shagging. A time-paradox movie for the pop-pomo age, *Austin* revisits 1969 entirely as a media fantasy world, and entirely in a spirit of nostalgic affection; and the historical culture-clash is played out entirely in intertextual film games with period movies then and now.

In notable contrast to WWW, there's no actual politics in *Austin*:

only the mildly amusing conceit of the Bond villain as professionally stateless evil mastermind, with his 1970-born son a Plain People of Cinema's voice of postmodern narrative conscience. The one historical event of 1969, not exactly a dull year, to warrant a cameo is its greatest (indeed, history's greatest) media event – and that entirely offscreen, without even one of the 800 easy gags that could have been made around the Eagle's landing in an Austinized counterfactual universe. There's a fleeting, poignant sense of *Austin*'s condition as allegorical of the state of Britain since the schwinging 60s ("look at you," says Austin sadly to his mojobless popsicle self: "you used to be so virile..."). But it doesn't linger, and instead we just get a lot of pathological shadow-boxing with *Star Wars*. If you only saw two films this summer, it would be a shame if this was the other.

Nick Lowe



Left: *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* – Heather Graham plays Felicity Shagwell.

Previous page: Antonio Banderas as Ibn Fahdlan in *The 13th Warrior*

The skydivers were abroad in the night and Gerald knew that it paid to be patient. He squatted just inside the mouth of the cave, his cam-suit set to maximum hide. The setting disabled most of his weaponry but if he was spotted by a skydiver no weapon ever handled by man would save him.

His star-sight goggles picked over the Pembrokeshire hills rolling down to Cardigan Bay. When he had been born in this place skydivers had been rare, now every year there were more of them. Some even lingered outside of the feeding season. That just showed the limits of an agreement between the weak and the strong, thought Gerald. The strong could bend such an agreement, slip under its meaning, and the weak dare not complain for fear that the strong would tear up the agreement altogether. In their skirts, thought Gerald, we hide. We do what we have to do. And we wait.

The pred-spot software built into his cam-suit identified a skydiver north of his position, out of eye range. The diver was swooping and hovering, swooping and hovering, not even bothering to shield itself. Gerald thought that if he switched from hide to attack mode there was a chance that he could damage the craft. There was a larger chance that he would not. And, of course, any attack would reveal his position. The skydiver operated with the arrogance of the strong while the weak played the odds.

His muted electronics showed the diver coming ever closer to the ground. Normal hunt behaviour. It was closing, Gerald knew, on some poor sod in a cam-suit trying to will the shakes out of his body as his equipment told the story of the last moments of his human life. The diver executed a short, powered dive. Divers did not care for ground-work and Gerald counted the seconds until his sensors reacquired the craft. It was just another piece of information for Strategy to integrate into their models. Gerald reached 30 and stopped. The diver was still on the ground. It was too long. Divers generally took less than 15 seconds to unload a human.

Centuries ago the English changed the language in our mouths, thought Gerald, but the divers want the very thoughts in our heads. He ran a quick system check. Every sign was in the green. Even if the craft had come up cloaked he should have registered something. He reviewed his data. The craft had made ground 2.2 Ks north of his position, toward Pentre Ifan. After 90 seconds he stood. He adjusted the parameters of his cam-suit to motion/hide and left the cave at a dead run. In the open the only protection was the camouflage offered by the cam-suit and by speed.

He barrelled along a narrow river valley. His cam-suit made tiny adjustments to blend him with the half-moonlit night. The cam-suit also dissipated his heat signature and damped the noise of his motion. Almost as if, he thought, you could pass through a place without leaving a trace. As though you were never there. He clambered north, up the side of the valley. Before broaching the ridge-line he reset his cam-suit to maximum hide. He was one K from the site. He initiated a 60-second, full-range frequency scan. When the divers had finished that's what this planet would be like: as if we were

# Of Divers Hawkers & Slugs

*David Gill*

never here. He looked up at a sky mouldy with stars. He did not know which was the home of the divers, so he cursed them all. Better to look up and see clear sky, he thought, then the monsters would not have come. The scan reported clean. He set the cam-suit to motion/hide and broke the ridge-line.

He sprinted across an undulating field. The soil was thin and broken up with stones. It had never been easy to scabble a living out of this earth, which was why the divers had taken their time reaching the place. Humanity here was spread as thin as the soil, was as close to the ground. There were easier places to feed. He ran along the lee of an unrepaired dry-stone wall. He was half a K from the site. He was showing a second diver at the very edge of his detection capability, 20 Ks and heading south, away from him. You took your chances, he thought, and kept moving. The second diver was over Haverfordwest and would have plenty on the ground to distract it. Thus in his head did he make up a reason for a decision taken largely in the gut.

The diver he was closing on had been down for minutes. *Minutes*. He had never known one on the ground for more than 20 seconds. His mind began to play with scenarios. A damaged diver which he somehow recovered. A diver caught unloading. In each vignette he was the hero. He was winning the war which everyone understood that they were losing. He loped up a wooded rise. Stupid thoughts, he thought, an unclearness that he did not need. He was doing the thing that was there for him to do. All else was clutter. He remembered his instructors: this war would not be won by heroes but by bloody grind. Clever, bloody grind. The diver was 100 metres beyond the crest of the hill. He slowed.

The trees around him were teased by a warm breeze floating off Cardigan Bay. To his left a brook splashed out a line of silver in the moonlight. This was, he thought, a beautiful spring evening. It was just that he could never enjoy it as such.

The divers operated from spring until winter. He wondered if Sam Goldhawk and his colleagues had ever understood how intimately they were ruining the human race. Of course, contact had been before Gerald's time. A set of repeating mathematical pulses to which Sam Goldhawk had replied without a thought. He had been a hero in his eyes first and in most other people's only a little later. Then the divers had arrived. Now, more than a century later, the name Sam Goldhawk was a curse. There were still Hawkers about, people who believed humans could come to some grand accommodation with the divers. But the reality of unloading made them rare. In an early dialogue which had banned humans from the air a patient diver had explained: "We are of the air. That is our natural domain. You are of the earth, like slugs." No one knew for sure if the insult was deliberate. The dialogue, like all dialogues with the divers, had been conducted in audio only across secure communications. Back then humans had been capable of being outraged. Now Gerald routinely referred to himself as a slug. He walked over the top of the rise.

The diver occupied a small clearing in the wood. Humans did not encounter divers outside their craft so

the term had come to refer interchangeably to both craft and occupant. Gerald willed himself still. His body screamed at him to run back into the woods or destroy the thing. With a motion a little clumsy with tension he began a scan. We were not simply machines driven by desires, he thought, not mechanisms of hormones and flesh: that was not an explanation of us. The scan would take a minute to play out. His eyes did not leave the diver. The thing was pale, its surface translucent; its set of graceful curves occupied the clearing. In Gerald's eyes it was an abomination.

Divers unloaded humans. That was what they did. They stripped the mind from a person and left only the body. They stole memory, feeling, knowledge, the consciousness of an individual. They took what it was to be a human. They left a shell, a mockery. The heart beat, the lungs sucked air but the person was gone. Priests and other religious folk cared for the husks that remained after unloading, but most did not survive long. When recovered they could not even process sight or sound. They had been wiped clean. And you could not survive the loss of yourself. Gerald had sworn to kill himself before being taken by a diver. Of course, many slugs had made the same oath but they had been unloaded. It was said that when the divers got into your head the first thing they did was prevent self-hurt. Or it could be, at the last, a failure of nerve. No one had ever come back to confirm.

The scan displayed negative results on the inside of his star-sight goggles. He hadn't expected a return from the scan but getting this close was exceedingly rare and the procedure was to scan. It was another small scraping of knowledge for Strategy. He went forward. His training suggested that he attempt a surface scan. His Strategy, which had contact with most surviving global Strategy teams, had records of only three attempted surface scans. The results were ambiguous and endlessly discussed. There had not been a successful surface scan for decades and he was carrying better equipment than had been available on previous attempts.

As he approached the curves of the diver seemed to shift. Like an animal adjusting its position. He stopped. He couldn't be sure of what he had seen. He took a step closer to the diver. He felt, or thought that he felt, something brush up against his mind. He set an explosive charge to a dead man's touch on his left palm, below his small finger. He applied pressure to the point and initiated the sequence. If pressure was lost on the point the explosive would detonate, killing him, denying him to the diver and, possibly, taking out the diver itself. No nerves now, he insisted of himself, this isn't about you. You are just a piece of the war.

He was readying his equipment for contact when the diver spoke.

"Please do not initiate contact." The voice was low and pleasant.

Gerald froze. Divers did not speak. They unloaded.

"I know this must be odd for you. Appreciate the strangeness for me. But we must talk."

Gerald switched his cam-suit to general combat mode.



"You would not survive a conflict." The diver's voice was unhurried, reasoned.

Could the diver monitor the status of his suit? Something else for Strategy, if he ever got back there. He locked on his weapons. "Better that than unloading," he said.

For the first time there was a hint of strain in the diver's tone: "It is my intention to avoid the function."

As it is mine, thought Gerald. He was perfectly positioned for a kill but his training told him that other outcomes were more desirable. Humans had never captured a diver. Could he disable the thing? His mind was scrambling over his options when they changed. The status of his weapons flipped out of the green and into the red. They all came off-line at the same time. He did not react, did not change his position. There was no point in confirming the success of the diver's tactic.

"If you attacked you would only damage yourself."

It was doing him favours before murdering him in his own body; taking the man and leaving the flesh to walk. "Don't be so sure," he snapped and rebalanced the weight of his body, adjusted his attack posture. His diagnostics pleaded with his weapons to come on-line.

"How long have we been on this world?" The diver's tone, ignoring the panic entering Gerald's voice and physical stance, was one of patient instruction.

It was a tone that Gerald despised. The diver thought that it could explain to him the necessity of his personal extinction. "Too long," Gerald answered and busied himself with his weapons. The power pack for his pulse rifle checked out, as did all the connections. It was the same for each of the weapons he carried integrated into his cam-suit. The individual parts reported normal; it was just that the thing as a whole did not function.

"One hundred and twenty-five years. I have been here that time," said the diver.

Gerald made a note of the indication of life-span. It was something else for Strategy, if he ever got back. He shut down his pulse rifle.

"I have known many of you," continued the diver.

You've sucked us out of ourselves, thought Gerald. He powered up his pulse rifle. Nothing there. He swore at himself.

"I needed..." The diver hesitated. The pattern of moonlight playing over it altered. "It has become important to me to meet one of you."

Yeah. Like after the steak you want to meet the cow. Gerald took a step back toward the wood. Useless, but it was best to be doing something. And you never knew. Perhaps the diver was damaged in some way. It hadn't unloaded him yet. "You want to be my friend?" Gerald sneered. His head was demanding: kill it, kill it. He didn't have the tools so he was backing off.

"We are an old civilization. Over the aeons we have become skilled in protecting ourselves. Some would say that that was our principal achievement. Not all of us are convinced that this is entirely healthy."

"You have suffered casualties." It was important for the weak to boast of the failures of the strong, to play up the all-too-few successes.

The diver paused for a moment. Gerald swallowed, his

big tongue wet in his dry mouth. He was afraid, but he had to await the proper moment to act on his fear; he had to believe that moment would come – for him or for others like him. "Most of my people do not visit worlds. They exist in..." The diver fiddled for the right words. "Communities in space. World-work is considered dangerously reckless. But the young – you know."

Gerald remembered the diver stating that he had been on earth for 125 years and he thought: Young?

"In many ways we no longer experience as you experience. But there is a call from our communities, our home places, for experiences without the risk of acquiring those experiences."

Is that what this was all about?, thought Gerald. Not a struggle for worlds. We were being stripped of our memories, our experiences as an entertainment for ageless communities cocooned in space. "I ought to kill you," hissed Gerald.

"Quite possibly, although I have deprived you of the means to do so. However, for a little while yet my death will not make a difference to human affairs. My living might."

"What difference could your living make to us?" He steadied the aim of his rifle as though either of them felt that meant anything.

"I have seen it with other species. Each world different but each outcome the same."

The diver had not answered his question but Gerald immediately pursued the offered information. "You have contact with other species?" This was the subject of constant conjecture. If there were others perhaps there could be allies.

"Life is rare but we are ancient. We know of others."

"And do you do to them what you do to us?"

"We follow our proclivities."

"You unload them?"

"There are many different methods of association."

"Do none resist?"

"Some. Most are easily overcome."

"Most?" Are we, thought Gerald, easily overcome?

"Some are more serious."

"You are at war?"

"In certain places. See how much information I freely give to you."

The diver, thought Gerald, would have his reasons for his actions. And those reasons might be deadly.

Moonlight lapped around the clearing. Leaves, bruised black by night, faded into one another, rustled free. Tiny mobile darknesses against the huddled mass of the night. Gerald knew the importance of the information offered by the diver. He was also aware of the fragility of his situation: one man, without weapons, in plain sight of a diver. Keep talking, he thought, make a little time. Sometimes the only choice of the weak with the strong was to prolong.

"How can you conduct wars against numerous other species?" Gerald asked.

"We are advanced in ways that you cannot imagine. Also, we have allies."

"Allies?" What would ally with a diver? To ally with

monsters was a kind of madness. Or a very special desperation.

"There are many methods of association," repeated the diver.

"Were we ever considered as allies?"

"In the beginning. But you cannot believe how good your species is to unload. Even now it is difficult for me to resist."

"You have no such difficulties with your allies?"

"The difficulty is much less. With you we can almost lose our reason. For us your experience is rich, deeply felt. It is almost as if it means more to us than it does to you."

Gerald drew in a breath, scowled. So the divers thought that they were better at being people than people.

The diver continued, in a kind of reverie. "Your experiences are occasionally stripped of logic yet strung together into intoxicating sense. A human is difficult to resist once you have the taste for it."

Gerald was the *it*. "But you are managing."

"I have prepared for this moment, evolved techniques. Still it is peculiarly difficult."

Gerald took another step back toward the wood but his foot encountered a sticky resistance in the air.

"We have not finished." The diver's voice was calm, stating a fact.

Says who, thought Gerald. But his weapons remained stubbornly off-line. "So it would seem." The weak had to work what options there were with the strong. He felt tears of sweat on his neck and back. The ventilation of his cam-suit adjusted to cope.

"The agreements we have on our presence in this area will be renegotiated."

The winter sky was free of divers. During all other seasons divers could unload and although humans could defend themselves the contest was grievously unequal. Damaged humanity in this part of the world needed winter to rebuild. Even with winter the numbers were sliding away. Without winter, thought Gerald, well: was this the end of his part of the world being announced?

"You will break the agreement?" Everyone he knew, all their family lines, erased. Fear made the words pebbles in his mouth.

"A faction with effective control of this community of divers want a renegotiation. I am not of their mind. It has been decided that I will aid you."

"Why?" Only the mad, or the impossibly desperate, would ally themselves with the agents of their destruction.

"The issues are complex. Not all of them bear saying in what I understand of your language. Let this suffice: we are slowing. After every success we pull a little further back into ourselves. There are fewer of us to do the work. Fewer young. Some of us believe that this trend will be fatal to our species."

So if you kill us all, thought Gerald, you die a little more yourselves. He couldn't take much comfort in that. "I am not interested in your internal feuding." Gerald tossed his words at the translucent shell of the diver.

"I would not expect you to be. Your confidence should be placed in this: I am working for what I understand

to be the best interests of my species. As are you. On that we can understand each other."

"And how will you aid us?" My enemy's enemy: a slippery and dangerous notion.

"I will aid you. Quite literally."

"You are coming over? You would fight your own kind?"

"I would like to think not. But in a manner of speaking."

There was a whisper of air and a box constructed of opaque material appeared half-way between Gerald and the diver.

"Pick it up. It has been adapted for human use."

Gerald stepped forward. The box had a handle. He lifted it. It was heavy but would be classified as portable by Strategy. Beneath its opaqueness shadows changed, chased each other. Gerald looked at the diver. "Is it alive?"

"No. But sometimes that becomes a nice question. As in the future you may discover. There is a trigger, a raised button on the inside of the handle."

"It is a weapon?"

"Yes."

"How can I be sure?"

"You have to use it on me."

"What?"

"It will eliminate suspicion of those with whom I am aligned."

Half an hour ago Gerald wouldn't have thought twice. But now he had talked to the thing his finger was less steady on the trigger. And perhaps that was the point. He hefted the weapon, aimed it crudely at the diver. "What is it?" he asked. "Explosive? Incendiary? Electronic?"

"Not quite any of those. Your scientists will pick the thing apart and find out. Also you will have me."

Gerald looked puzzled.

"I will be dead. But my body and my craft, although damaged, will not be destroyed."

"So slugs will recover a diver?"

"Indeed. And if you are of a mind I will tell you more than the weapon."

Gerald thought of the many ways in which this could be a trick.

"Do you really think I need to trick you? To go to these lengths to unload a human?"

He hadn't even felt the thing in his mind. The line of his mouth hardened.

"Remember," said the diver. "We each pursue our own interests. It just so happens that at this time and in this place the interests of my species are advanced by my death. I have thought about this longer than you have lived. Here and now the interests of our species intersect. Press the trigger."

Gerald's hesitation was momentary. A memory of his sister Bronwyn, unloaded by a diver when she was 17, popped into his mind. Later he would wonder if the memory arose unbidden or whether it had been summoned by the diver. He pressed the trigger.

There was no flash nor thunder, just a faint smell singeing the air. He approached the diver. Its shell had hardened from translucence to a ceramic solidity. He placed his hand on the craft. It was cool and damp. The weak,

with the terrible patience of the powerless, could overcome the strong. He shifted the diver weapon from his right to his left hand, thumbed his wrist communicator, and sent an encrypted snap-code to Strategy: diver down/recoverable. Whoever was picking up the slack at Strategy was going to come out of his comfortable chair.

Things changed, thought Gerald, if you held on long enough things turned in ways you would not believe. The world was too messy to be entirely managed by the strong. Things slipped under the firmest and cleverest of controls. Even for divers things came apart.

The slug looked into the night sky and, for the first time since he had understood what he was seeing there, he did not curse the stars.

**David Gill** is a Welsh writer whose work has appeared in such publications as *The London Magazine*, *Jennings Magazine*, *Cambrensis* and *The New Welsh Review*. He lives in London, and the above is his first story for *Interzone*.

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Illustration by Shoun Ton

I write with severe jet-lag, having just returned from the World SF Convention in Melbourne – to which your columnist was miraculously wafted by generous fans worldwide who'd decided I should be there and deviously raised money for fares and hotels. Thus unfortunate Aussies suffered their continent's first Live Thog's Masterclass performance, and I was able not only to accept two Hugos in person but to carry them home... after discovering that my joking prediction that the trophy base would be a lifelike model of Ayers Rock was, in fact, entirely accurate. The giggles of Australian Customs x-ray operators are still ringing in my ears. Here's the Hugo list:

Novel: Connie Willis, *To Say Nothing of the Dog*.

Novella: Greg Egan, "Oceanic" (*Asimov's* 8/98).

Novelette: Bruce Sterling, "Taklamakan" (*Asimov's* 10/98).

Short: Michael Swanwick, "The Very Pulse of the Machine" (*Asimov's*, 2/98).

Related Book: Thomas M. Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*.

Dramatic: *The Truman Show*.

Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois.

Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton.

Semiprozine: *Locus* (the runner-up was *Interzone*).

Fanzine: *Ansible*.

Fan Writer: Dave Langford.

Fan Artist: Ian Gunn.

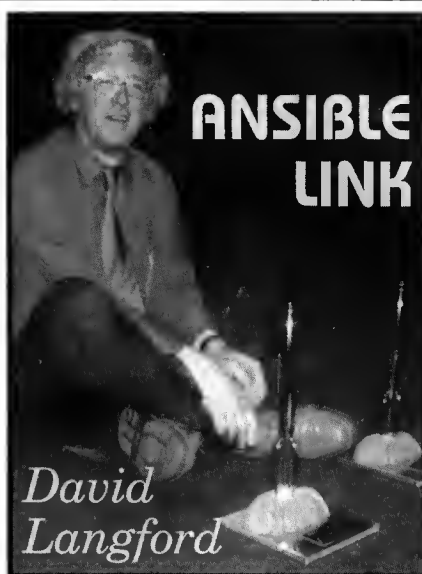
John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (not actually a Hugo): Nalo Hopkinson.

Thus our very own Greg Egan and the talented cartoonist Ian Gunn become the first Australians to win Hugos for fiction or artwork. Neither was present: Gunn died tragically young from cancer last year, while the famously reclusive Egan did not (as expected) e-mail a Copy of himself but merely sent a representative.

## FRUITS OF THE AGATHON

**Iain M. Banks**, man of versatile middle initials, confided further secret identities to the *Daily Telegraph*: "If I do cowboy novels I'll be Iain Z. Banks. And Iain X. Banks for pornography."

**Raymond Briggs** of *Fungus the Bogeyman* fame ranted – tongue in cheek, we hope – about J. K. Rowling's best-selling *Harry Potter* fantasies: "It is very galling when a pip-squeak novice, decades younger, bursts into an oldie's profession and has instant colossal success. It's not fair. Some of us have been toiling in the vineyard of children's books for over 40 years. We are now just starting to draw our tiny pensions when onto the scene leaps



this teenage upstart..." There is much more. "She'll probably turn to drink and drugs," speculated Mr Briggs before adding, "Mind you, I haven't read the books myself."

**Neil Gaiman** was startled to get a Mythopoeic Award (a small seated lion officially not known as the Aslan), since: "the only awards I ever get are the ugly ones: awards in the shapes of bombs, springs, bricks, lumps of plastic, Easter Island H. P. Lovecraft heads and the occasional unlovely wooden plaque. I never get the pretty ones." Diana Wynne Jones appears to disagree about the lion's prettiness.

**Alison Spedding**, UK fantasy author and anthropologist, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in Bolivia after being convicted this summer on charges of possessing marijuana – which she admits, for personal use – and dealing in it, which she denies. Her publishers, Voyager, say: "She is, apparently, in good heart." Parole might possibly halve the sentence. Messages of sympathy can be sent c/o Debbie Aliaga, British Embassy, Avenida Arc 2732, PO Box 694, La Paz, Bolivia.

**James White** (1928-1999), the much-loved Irish sf author, died soon after an unexpected stroke in August. It's hardly necessary to mention the popularity of his long-running Sector General series of clever, funny and compassionate space-hospital stories, which continued in America throughout the 1990s (the last was *Double Contact* from Tor in October) even while British neglect of midlist sf made his work almost invisible here. He was a key member, with Walt Willis, the late Bob Shaw and others, of the highly influential 1950s Irish Fandom – the "Wheels of IF" – which grew from his and Willis's painfully hand-set, letterpress fanzine *Slant*, founded in 1948. James White was extremely tall, gen-

tlemanly and kind, one of those rare people whom no one could dislike, and much in demand as a guest at sf conventions. He leaves an aching gap.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**That Hideous Acronym.** In August, the UK government betrayed its spin-doctors' unfamiliarity with C.S. Lewis by launching the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, or N.I.C.E... Who is its Head? Where are Merlin and Mr Fisher-King now that we need them?

**World Fantasy Awards.** Here's the 1999 novel shortlist: Charles de Lint, *Someplace to Be Flying*; Louise Erdrich, *The Antelope Wife*; Guy Gavriel Kay, *Sailing to Sarantium*; Sean Stewart, *Mockingbird*; Thomas Sullivan, *The Martyring*.

**Thog's Science Masterclass.** The chief scientific advisor of the OSS briefs senior officers: "...a plant in Denmark that had been engaged in research into a substance called heavy water. This substance, he explained – until it became apparent that no one else either understood or much cared about it – was water to whose molecular structure had been appended another hydrogen atom. The Germans were apparently trying to cause a chain – or explosive – effect by releasing the extra hydrogen atom so appended." (W. E. B. Griffin, *The Secret Warriors*, 1985)

**Stop Press.** The last of the hand-typeset, letterpress sf fanzines, *Stefantasy*, has ceased publication after 44 years and 123 issues. The 123rd appeared in December 1998. Editor Bill Danner started work on number 124 but feels he's "slowed down" too much ever to complete it: he's 92.

**Sidewise Awards** for alternate-history sf went to Stephen Fry's *Making History* (long) and Ian R. MacLeod's "The Summer Isles" (short).

**Thog's Masterclass.** "Cassini was not heading for the heart of Titan's face..." (Stephen Baxter, *Titan*, 1997) *Dept of Split-Second Timing*: "He was killed on a Thursday afternoon, crossing the street; run down by a taxicab, the driver racing to carry his passenger to Manchester Piccadilly in time for a noon train." (Clive Barker, *Sacrament*, 1996) *Dept of How To Internalize A Small 18th-Century Pavilion*: "It is, in fact, no longer a place, no longer out there, but a precise metaphysical node in the inner topography of my being, a conjuncture where fallibility, mortification and unease meet to gloat and whisper their incoherent secrets." (Adrian Mathews, *Vienna Blood*, 1999) "If eyes had been hands, he would've crushed her." (Peter Hamilton, *The Naked God*, 1999)



# Naming *the* Dead

*Paul J. McAuley*

“I want you to prove he killed my Emma,” the woman told me.

“You realize, madam –”

“I only want to know.”

“– that the police will not use anything I find as evidence.”

“I have to know.”

“Perhaps you should talk with someone else first.”

“My husband divorced me. My mother and father are dead. My Emma is dead. I am alone, Mr Carlyle.”

She was wrong, of course. None of us are alone. Neither the living nor the dead. Even in my sanctuary there were the feeble ghosts of the silkmaker and his wife. And there was the thing clinging to my would-be client’s shoulder.

Her hands tightened on the straps of her handbag. She said, “I know what you are. I know what you can do. I want you to help me find my Emma.”

I said, in my very best soothing voice, “Perhaps you would like some more tea, Mrs Stokes? And perhaps one of the delicious chocolate bourbon biscuits.”

“I am quite calm, Mr Carlyle. I have no need of the sovereign remedy, and I think that you have eaten all the biscuits.”

I had to admit that Mrs Stokes was a formidable woman. Although she was made uneasy by the steady hiss of the gas mantles, the green wallpaper, the heavy walnut furniture and the crowded ranks of books, she tried not to show it as she sat bolt upright in the wing armchair, clutching her quilted blue handbag to her lap as if it contained her life. It was four o’clock on a dreary wet November day, darkness already lying deep in the narrow streets outside, made more sepulchral by a dis-

tant glimpse of the bright neon of the curry houses and Bangladeshi video shops of Brick Lane. The coal fire gave out a withering heat, but Mrs Stokes had kept on her gaberdine raincoat. She lived alone but she took trouble over her appearance out of habit, her lined face softened with pancake and blusher, her thin lips reddened with “Autumn Maple” lipstick, the white helmet of her hair stiffened by a new perm. When she leaned forward, she gave off an acrid little cloud compounded of the scent of face powder and Arpege. The thing at her shoulder glared at me with a mixture of spite and fear. It was her own ghost, but it had the heart-shaped face of her dead daughter, whose photograph lay on the walnut table between us. She had spent much money and more energy finding me. I knew I was her last hope. I am the last hope of all who manage to find me.

Mrs Stokes – although she was divorced, she would never give up the “Mrs” – picked up the photograph. “He killed her, Mr Carlyle,” she said. “I know that he did. He cut off her face. That was how she was found, naked, without a face. Like his other victims. But he wouldn’t confess.”

She said this quite dispassionately. Her eyes were hard and bright. She was long past crying. Years past. Emma had run away to London and been killed twelve years ago. Her body had been dumped in wasteland behind King’s Cross. A year later, Robert Summers had been caught in a burnt-out lock-up close by, wearing the face of his victim and doing something so unspeakable to her body that two of the three policemen who made the arrest took early retirement after the trial. He was found sane, was sent down for the one murder. There was no evidence – blood, DNA, fingerprints, fibre – to tie

him to the other six murders, nothing but the method of killing, the strangulation and partial flaying of the victims. His brief made a good case that he was a copy-cat killer. He had no previous criminal record, had held the same job, as an inventory clerk in one of the big Oxford Street department stores, for 15 years. He got the usual tariff, reduced for good behaviour. He spent his last year in an open prison, had been on the streets for three weeks.

Emma Stokes's mother had started to look for someone like me as soon as she knew that Summers would be released. She had sold the house her husband had been forced to give her after the divorce. She had rented a room in Dalston, amongst the sound systems and Turkish restaurants. Money meant nothing to her. She wanted nothing except to know. To know that he had done it. To purge any of Emma's ghosts, if they still remained.

I could cure her at once, of course, but I would not. I needed the money. Still, I felt sorry for her. I tried to explain again that anything I found could not be used in a court. There were still a few old-fashioned policemen who were sympathetic, but the system had changed.

"In any event," I said, "it is unlikely that any of Emma's ghosts will remember anything useful, something I can give the police so they can find some piece of tangible evidence. Ghosts rarely do remember what happened when they were cast off."

"That doesn't matter, Mr Carlyle. I have no faith in the police."

I knew a flat in one of the point blocks off Kingsland Road, not far from where she was renting a room, where you could hire a gun for £50 an hour, no questions asked. But I doubted that she wanted revenge. And it was none of my business anyway. My business was with the dead.

I told her my terms. She had done her research. She had the money, and the other things. She handed over the money without a qualm, but it took a visible effort for her to give up the rest.

"You will find her," she said.

"I will get in contact with you when it is over."

She started to tell me the number of the pay telephone in the rooming house, but I said, "I do not use the telephone, Mrs Stokes. But be assured that I will be in contact with you when it is over. Not before. It might take some time."

"I have been waiting twelve years, Mr Carlyle."

On the way out, she asked the question most of my clients have not dared to ask. "Why do you live like this?"

She said it with a trace of her old prim, suburban judgmentalism. I said, "You will not need to come here again."

"I don't mind it. But it makes what you do seem like... an act. I hope it is not, Mr Carlyle. I have put my Emma in your hands."

I went to King's Cross first, but there was nothing of Emma Stokes there, nor anything of the other victims. There were plenty of other ghosts, of course, mostly

scraps of spent lust mingled with sparks of rage from the clients of the whores who still work the station, despite the security cameras and the extra police patrols. I dispatched them all, and afterwards became aware of an old woman watching me amongst the weeds on the far side of a tangle of rusting tracks. Her long black dress and shawl looked to be Victorian, and I made a note to investigate once the case was over. Long-lived ghosts are rare, even in London. I thought that I knew them all, and I have a particular affinity for Victorian ghosts.

Later, when I asked the Librarian about her, he smiled faintly and said, "There are many of us you do not know about, Carlyle. The living cannot know all the names of the dead."

"But you know who she was?"

"As a matter of fact I do not. But I could make enquiries..."

"Not now."

"Because you wish me to observe this murderer of young girls. How poorly you must think of me, Carlyle, for you always force me to associate with these unsavoury characters."

"You don't have to do it." I had the things Mrs Stokes had given me in the pockets of my trenchcoat. The Librarian knew that they were there; his eyes, faint stars in his pale face, kept straying towards them.

"It is a living," he said. "Where is he?"

I told him, and he said, "Ah, the tea gardens, and the New River. I spent many a happy afternoon there in the bosky meadows."

There were no tea gardens there now. They had been built over long ago, and built over again with the interlocked decks of the Marquess Estate. Robert Summers had been given a one-bedroom flat there. I had watched him for most of the afternoon as he sat hunched on one of the benches in the triangular Green in Islington, at the junction of Upper Street and Essex Road, had waited outside the nearby branch Sainsbury's while he spent an hour buying half a carrier-bag's worth of groceries. A scrawny harmless man, unshaven, his iron-grey hair sticking up in a cowlick over a bland unlined face. He wore a new black suit and a dirty white shirt. People knew to give him a wide berth as he shuffled along.

But no ghosts clung to him. Perhaps he had lost them in prison to someone more powerful. Most ghosts are unfaithful, short-lived things.

The Librarian was one of the more persistent ghosts, the death shell of a man who had died in the mid-19th century. He was, like many ghosts, vague about the person who had cast him off. He had not been a librarian, but something to do with the book trade, perhaps a bookseller or a bookbinder or a printer. He had taken up semi-permanent residence in the reading room of the British Library, which was where I had come to consult with him, pretending to read a trade union history while conducting a whispered conversation. No one took any notice. A lot of the scholars and journalists who worked

on the curved ranks of cubicles talked to themselves. It was raining, and the rain pattered on the high ceiling overhead.

I said, "What will you do, when this place is closed?"

"There are plenty of other accommodations. Or perhaps I will choose to pass over at last. The 20th Century is becoming tiresome, and I do not look forward to the millennium. Now, the stuff, if you please, and I will be gone as quickly as Puck or Ariel."

I took out the things Mrs Stokes had given me, and laid them on the reading desk. A square of blue nylon cut from one of Emma's old sheets. An old lipstick, dried out. A pair of plain white Marks & Spencer knickers. A photograph, formally posed.

The Librarian lowered his face to them, as greedy as an addict. He sighed, and said, "Yes, it is so strong, so good..." and then faded, the stars of his eyes going last of all. As I gathered up the material the electric bell rang. It was closing time.

Like the Librarian, I find the late 20th Century tiresome. Because of my dress and the furnishing of my house, most people assume that I affect a late Victorian style to express this distaste, but that is not the case. It is simply a style I have never outgrown. And it was the time in which my family first gained influence over the dead.

We had a long and honourable history as sin-eaters and sriers, but it was grandfather who began the trade in what is now known, inaccurately, as the paranormal. It was he who codified a systematic approach to the matter of the dead. I am the last of my line. My mother and father died when our house was destroyed by an ill-advised experiment, and when I had recovered I moved from Edinburgh to London, and bought a house in Spitalfields.

It was a Georgian house in poor repair, and I have done nothing since to modernize it, or, like some of my neighbours, to restore it to its original state. (I have several times resisted visits from well-meaning members of the self-styled historical society, who give conducted tours of their restored houses dressed in Georgian costume; but my black suit, paisley waistcoat, homburg, walking stick and fob watch are not a costume.) There is no electricity, and no telephone, but those things are not necessary. As light attracts moths, so electricity attracts too many partial ghosts, and I do not need the distraction. I have gas mantles, and coal fires in the winter. And anyone who wants to find me will eventually do so, or they will discover in the process of trying to find me that they do not, after all, need my help.

But the most important thing is that it is a quiet house, a quiet place, and well protected. How difficult that is to find in any large city! All who died here died natural deaths; they led content and happy lives. When I found it, there were no ghosts thrown off by hate or fear, by ecstasy or enlightenment. Ghosts of the original owners, a Huguenot silkmaker and his wife, sometimes drift through the rooms, and the ghost of the cobbler who lived and worked in the basement for more than 50 years can sometimes be heard, but they are all

weak and harmless fragments, no more of a nuisance than the mice which rustle behind the walnut panelling. A few imps of delirium left by the hippies who squatted there in the early 1970s were easy to disperse, and other ghosts are kept at bay by soul catchers at doors and windows, and regular asperging with rosemary, moly, and rue.

Such places are increasingly rare as ghosts multiply. Fewer people seem inclined to a quiet death, and the jostle of the city's population fills its streets with malevolent ghosts cast off in moments of intense anger or fear. Traffic intersections are crowded with the remnants of motorists' frustrations; I am unable to visit hospitals, or to travel on the Underground, or pass near casinos (although they do not know it, gamblers are quite right to use fresh decks of cards with each session, for the ghosts which cling to used cards strongly affect the laws of chance). Many churches are still peaceful, as are certain graveyards. After all, very few die in either place, and those mourning the dead do not shed ghosts for mourning is an emotional state akin to exhaustion, not a state of heightened awareness.

The long-dead, such as the Librarian, find the press of ghosts as tiresome as I. And of course for them certain ghosts are dangerous. There are lions and tigers and bears loose in the world. More of them, it seems, every year, as if the millennium on whose brink we tremble will after all be the threshold of the pit. London is crowded with ghosts, imps and other revenants, but the truly long-lived manifestations are dwindling. They are being eaten by those of their kind which require the energy of others to sustain them.

But that was not the immediate threat, which manifested itself as two men who materialized on either side of me as I was making my way through the crowded Spitalfields market the Sunday after Mrs Stokes had visited me. I had bought walnut bread at one stall, organic potatoes and cabbage at another, and a water-stained edition of Hick's *Death and Eternal Life*, which promised to be amusing. It was difficult to disengage as the two men took me by the elbows and steered me into a corner by one of the gates.

"We've been looking for you," the smaller one said. He was sweating despite the cold, a slight, sandy-haired man with a narrow moustache, wearing an immaculate London Fog raincoat. There were imps clinging to his thinning hair, spiky black things that chittered like bats. He said, "You are a hard man to find."

"I am glad to hear it," I said. "My house is protected."

"But *you* aren't protected," the smaller man said, and told his companion, "Show him what I mean."

The larger man opened his leather jacket to show me the jointed metal truncheon tucked into the inside pocket.

"This is in the nature of a warning," the smaller man said.

"You have an infestation," I said. "Who is it that marked you?"

"Don't play games. I was warned about you and I don't believe in all that shit, all right?" The imps were whispering in his ears, and he said his piece defiantly, but

his eyes glittered. He knew that he was trapped, although he did not understand how.

"Then you are in great danger, my friend."

"You be quiet! Roddy here has a lot of toys, and he likes using them. We could go back to your house and he'll give you a free trial."

"I do not think I could allow you to find my house. I expect that you have been looking for it all morning, and you have not found it. Nor will you. Give me the message, and leave."

The sandy-haired man handed me an envelope. "This will explain everything. You are threatening the interests of a powerful man, Mr Carlyle."

"And who would he be?"

The imps chittered. The man said, "No names, no pack drill."

"Ah. One of those."

"You just stop. All right? Remember Edinburgh."

"What do you know about –"

But the little man was already walking away, head down, the big man at his back, towards the black 500 series BMW parked on the double yellow lines just outside the gate. I watched as they got into the back of the car; someone was waiting inside, but I saw only a shadow before the door closed and the car drove off.

There was a speck of an imp in the seal of the envelope, and I crushed it by reflex. It was designed to do but one thing, squeal that the envelope had been opened, and I gave it no chance to do that. It could have told me nothing more than its existence already told me, that the man who had sent the message knew something about the matter of the dead.

Inside, the message was crude and shocking. I did not look at it again, but called upon an old friend.

We met early the next morning near Smithfield Market, in one of the public houses which are licensed to open at 6.30 am. Superintendent Rawles looked at the photograph that had been inside the envelope and said that it was part of the crime-scene documentation.

"I'll look into how it was leaked," he said. He was a tall, slender, upright man, with close-cropped white hair and a military bearing, and one of the most honest men I have ever met. He was working on his second pint of bitter while I ate the excellent full English breakfast – the pinnacle of the cuisine of this wretched country I have adopted – which the public house served.

"It is not where the photograph came from which is important."

I described Mrs Stokes's commission, the two men who had delivered the envelope, and my suspicion that this was the work of a would-be necromancer who believed that he had some use for the murderer, Robert Summers.

"There's an incident room already set up," Inspector Rawles said. "Perhaps you can come in and look at the books, see if you can spot these bad boys. But that's all I can let you do. It's out of my hands, Carlyle."

"You know that they will not be amongst your mugshots."

"No, I suppose not. She was your client. What was she doing there?"

"She had rented the room. I believe that she had sold her house."

"Keep away from Summers. We're watching him. Your client is dead; you don't have that job any more."

The Librarian was watching Summers. I said, "I do not need to go near him. Do you think he killed her?"

"You look pale," Rawles said. "Paler than usual, although I see that your appetite is as healthy as ever. You think this necromancer chap might actually be dangerous?"

"Only if he is more ignorant than usual. It is not the thought of him which makes me uncomfortable, despite this excellent repast, but the proximity of the market."

Rawles smiled. "The ghosts of cows?"

I used the last of the blood pudding – they served two kinds there, white and black – to wipe up the last of the egg yolk. "Animals leave no ghosts. It is not the meat market, but the public executions that were held here. Mary Tudor had 200 martyrs burned; before that heretics and witches were roasted, burned or boiled alive. Traces remain, even after all these years. Effluvia from the crowd rather than the ghosts the poor tormented victims cast off at the death. Still, it is not as bad as the public transport system."

"You're too sensitive for this city, lad," Rawles looked at the polaroid again. "It has your artist's mark. But whoever did it didn't know much about skinning. Summers used a proper flensing knife, and he has had practice using it. Unfortunately he used a different knife each time, which is why the forensic boffins couldn't pin the full slate to him. But this wasn't done with a flensing knife. We think this was done with the same combat knife that the murderer used to cut her throat. We found the weapon, no prints of course, and it could have been bought in any one of a hundred shops. We're canvassing them, but I doubt if we'll get anywhere. This is a professional hit."

"It was meant as a message, to me. Summers is more than he seems."

"You stay away. We can handle it."

"He has no ghosts. He murdered at least 15 girls and he has no ghosts at all."

"Is that strange? He was in prison a long time."

Rawles was a practical man; he had grasped many of the nuances of the matter of the dead instinctively.

"Not strange, but it is unusual, given the interest in him."

Rawles drained his pint. "Perhaps this chap who put the heavies on you took Summers's ghosts."

"Then why is Summers still of interest? You drink too much, Robert."

"And you have a healthy appetite. I have to see my chief in a couple of hours. A bloodless Ph.D in sociology who did about six hours on the beat before getting a desk job. He's 15 years younger than me. He talks like a company executive, quotas and efficiency and targets. I'll retire next year. They'll probably put a computer in to replace me. This isn't like the old days, Carlyle."

"As I am all too unfortunately aware."

As we parted, he added, "I hope that's just a walking stick these days. If some eager young bobby thinks to



take a look, he'll do you for carrying a concealed weapon."

It was not the last warning I was to receive that day.

My house is, as I have said, protected. There are not many streets at the heart of old Spitalfields, a brief grid with the market on one side and the exotic glamour of Brick Lane on the other, but for anyone searching for my house with malice in their hearts they can become impossibly tangled.

But my next warning did not knock upon my door. Instead, it came roaring and gurgling out of the slate sink in the kitchen which took up the basement where the cobbler had once worked. The noise shook the whole house, but I was already coming down the stairs with a candle; I had felt the wind of its approach.

The water spout had formed a thick column of water that shook and shivered as it spun around and around. It glowed with a faint, greenish light. It stank horribly.

A face formed on its shivering surface, the kind of face you might imagine seeing on the trunk of a tree where a branch has been torn away, or the kind of face which rises towards you out of the scintillae you make when you press your fingertips against your closed eyelids. An approximation of a face. It had no eyes but I knew it could see me as it whirled around. It made a horrid gargling sound when it spoke.

It spoke in Latin, and I knew at once what it was. The oldest of all the ghosts of London. At once, I made obeisance.

He had never been a person, and that made him more terrible and powerful than any ordinary ghost. He was something like the effluvia which had made me uncomfortable near Smithfield Market, the accumulated bloodlust of the tens of thousands of men and women who had come to watch the executions for sport. Like that, but far more powerful and focused, for he had been formed and reinforced by the sacrificial ceremonies of those who had worshipped at the Temple of Mithras, founded by Ulpus Silvanus, a veteran of the II Legio Augusta during the Roman occupation of Britain. Archaeologists found a relief sculpture of a god killing a bull, a sculpture of a river god and other remains in the middle of the Walbrook, the long-buried tributary around which the Romans had built their original settlement, but only I knew precisely where the temple had stood, and the nature of the rituals. There had been sacrifice of bulls, but also human sacrifice: the victims had been sealed in the belly of a brazen bull, and fires lit beneath it.

The thing which manifested itself through the drain of my kitchen sink was the remnant of the river god which worship and sacrifice had created. You might say that it was the echo of a collective mania so strong it had lasted for 2,000 years. It spoke only in Latin, but because of my long apprenticeship to my father I was not only fluent in Latin but knew (unlike all living scholars of that dead language) how to pronounce it correctly. I even knew that Mithras had a Spanish accent; Ulpus Silvanus, like many of the legionaries who had occupied Britain, had come from the Mediterranean shore of Spain.

"You will not disturb the murderer," Mithras said. "You will leave all alone, and all will be well."

"Why is that? What is your interest?"

"I speak for all the dead."

"Then I am honoured that you should visit me." I took a steak from the meat safe and threw it into the whirling unstable column of water. It vanished at once, shredding into pulp and blood. It was to have been my supper, but I felt that propitiation of the old god was more important. I had only ever seen Mithras once before, on an ill-advised expedition beneath London with the young engineer and Dr Pretorius, and that had been long ago, in my salad days.

Mithras said, "The sacrifice is acceptable. You may ask a question."

Once, dozens of bulls had been slaughtered in a single day in his honour. Men drunk on the thick red wine called Bull's Blood had run through the streets ahead of the animals before they had been sacrificed. The men who had fallen to the bulls had been as much sacrifices to Mithras as those roasted inside the brazen bull. Mithras had been very powerful. He had protected the Roman settlement from ancient indigenous ghosts of the wild lands outside the stockade walls. He survived only because he had once been so powerful. He was an echo, a revenant, but not without influence. I wondered how long it had been since someone had given him tribute.

"One question," he said again. "Ask!"

"Is Robert Summers owned by a living man?"

"There is no such person as Robert Summers."

"Then what is he?"

"You have asked your question. It is answered. Ask no more. Seek no more. You have some protection here, but I could remove it all if I wished."

"Where is the Librarian? Bring him here and I will speak with him."

The speed of the revolving column of water increased. Greasy droplets dashed against my face. The whirling water made a high wailing sound, and out of it Mithras said, "He no longer exists."

"Did Summers kill him? Or the man who has taken control of him?"

"Ask no more. Remember you live here upon my suffering."

"Hmm. With respect, that is not quite true. This place lies to the east of the walls of your city."

"Some of my dead lie nearby. It is enough."

I remembered then that a Roman cemetery had been discovered 400 years ago, in the fields to the east of the priory of St Mary Spital. I opened my mouth to ask one more question, but the face dissolved or spread out across the glowing surface of the unstable column of water. The force which held the water together vanished.

I stepped back and dropped the candle as the flood spun out in an splattering arc across the kitchen. I was alone in darkness.

I could not let the mystery lie. Although my client was dead and the contract dissolved, it was clear that taking Mrs Stokes's money had put me in danger. Oh, not yet, but if I let it go then the amateur who was meddling

with the ghosts of Robert Summers would do something stupid. Better to stop it now, whatever Mithras said, than wait until it got worse.

And besides, I had always liked the Librarian.

As I mopped the flood of stinking drain water from the old linoleum, I thought of a ghost who might be able to help me. I finished the work and carefully sprinkled dried rue and wild garlic on the last of the water before pouring it down the drain. It would not keep out the river god, of course, but it would stop imps and other sprites from following his path.

I made no other precautions. It would not do to attract attention.

I ate lunch at one of the fine Bangladeshi restaurants in Brick Lane, and then set off north. I could not ride in public transport because I needed to keep my mind clear (and taxis were worse repositories of shed moments of anger than buses). It was cold, a sharp dry cold, the sky clear except for a few high strands of cirrus, darkening in the east.

It took an hour to walk to the rooming house where Mrs Stokes had been murdered. I was happy to be alone with my thoughts. At one point I passed a mosque under construction, and wondered what ghosts it would add to the city, but for the most part I thought hard about what must be done.

Mrs Stokes had rented a room in one of the houses in the Victorian terraces behind Ridley Road Market. They had been poor things when they had been thrown up to help accommodate the increasing population of factory labourers, and they had not lasted well. There were three lidless dustbins and a broken pram amongst the dead weeds in the mean little garden, and a bored young constable stood in front of the door, which had been sealed with blue and white crime-scene tape. The circus which accompanied any murder – and I do not mean the police, the forensic team, the ambulance and the crowd of morbid onlookers – had passed on.

But something lingered.

I had bought a slab of cheesecake in the 24-hour Jewish bakery, and I walked to the end of the road and ate it while I waited. The streetlights came on and the sky beyond them darkened. It was cold, and I wished that I had bought some coffee with the cheesecake.

But at last I caught a faint scent of face powder and Arpege, and without turning around I knew that she had come to me.

The ghost of Mrs Stokes was remarkably composed, but from my brief meeting with her when she had been alive I had expected nothing less. I had been counting on it, in fact. She knew that she was dead, although like all ghosts she did not remember dying. I remembered the photograph I had been given and thought it a mercy.

When the traffic had thinned out – she found the rushing cars a terrible distraction, as if each promised to bear her away to paradise – I walked along Balls Pond Road. She was at my back, talking about her Emma. I think that she had become fused or mixed with the thing which had been at her back when she had come to see me, or

perhaps this was the same ghost, strengthened by the death of the woman who had thrown it off.

It would not matter soon. All that did matter was that it would do as I asked.

“I will see her again. My Emma, just as she was.”

“Yes, you will see her again.”

I could have removed the ghost at Mrs Stokes’s back when she had first come to see me. She would have lost her obsession, and gone away. It was something I could have done with most of my clients, but I had needed the money. Now, I thought that it was fortunate that I had no scruples. For otherwise I would not have known what kind of creature Robert Summers was, and of the man who had an interest in him, until too late.

But I knew that it would still be difficult to stop them.

I tried to tell the ghost, but she babbled happily that it did not matter. “I know what I must do and I know I can do it. I can do it for my Emma. I know I can.” And, “I will take her to the arms of Jesus, Mr Carlyle. I will find the way.” And, “How strange everything looks! Some things so bright, the rest so dark. I had a television once which showed pictures like this. The thing controlling its picture had broken. It was all light or all dark. I had to take it back to the shop and there was quite an argument over replacing it, although I was fully within my rights. Is this how it looks to you, Mr Carlyle?”

“Sometimes.”

“No wonder you live the way you do. I know now why you have no electricity. I think I can see electricity now. Every car is a scrawled outline of electric wires, like the filaments in a light bulb.”

No, she did not really understand. She seemed much younger. I think that she was assuming the form in which she remembered her daughter, but I did not dare look around to see.

The big, black BMW was parked on double yellow lines on Essex Road, by the stairs which led to the first floor deck of the block of flats. Its motor was idling – a white plume of exhaust waved in the air from its tailpipe – but I could not see who was inside because the windows were tinted.

Mrs Stokes knew that her Emma was not inside the car. I nearly lost her as she went gadding away towards Summers’s flat, light and limber as a young girl. It was all I could do to restrain her as I went puffing up the stairs, but the swirling graffiti helped divert her attention.

At the top were the two men who had accosted me in Spitalfields Market. I had expected nothing less.

“You’re not wanted here,” the sandy-haired one said sharply. “You clear off, granddad.”

His boldness was a mask. I could smell his fear. His imps were a ruff of sharply angled black bodies tangled around his head, squeaking with fury.

“My business is with your master,” I said. “I believe that he is in Robert Summers’s flat. Stand aside, sir.”

I was afraid, of course, but determined to see this through. It occurred to me that Mrs Stokes’s obsession had transferred to me.

The sandy-haired man raised a hand. He wore black leather gloves.

I unlatched my cane and whipped it up. The cover flew off, revealing the short, double-edged blade.

The sandy-haired man barked a brief laugh and took a step backwards. "Who d'you think you are? Zorro? Put it away or you'll get hurt."

"Will you stand aside?"

"Get him," the sandy-haired man said. His hand was inside his London Fog raincoat and I knew that he had a revolver. But he did not want to use it because it would immediately attract attention.

The big man stepped forward, his hands working, and I pointed the blade at his face so that he went cross-eyed as he tried to focus on it, then whipped it down and drew a line on the dirty rippled concrete of the walkway. The man's eyes followed and stayed there, and something in him relaxed. It was a small trick, but effective. He would stare at the line I had scratched into the concrete until I released him. He would not be able to move his eyes from it at all, even if all the women he most desired paraded naked in front of him. Already he was trying to break free – I could see sweat gathering on his forehead, and tears swelling in his unblinking eyes – but I knew that he could not.

The sandy-haired man drew his revolver with a convulsive movement when I pointed my sword at him. "You stay there," he said. "Just keep still or you'll regret it."

I was tired of his threats. I dismissed his retinue of chattering imps and he batted wildly at the air around his head and looked at me as if for the first time. His mouth opened, but there was nothing to put words into it.

"Wait by the car," I suggested.

He nodded violently. "Yes. That's what I should do. He wants to see you. And I'll go and wait..."

"In the car."

After he had gone, I went past the big man – who strained and failed to lift his eyes – to the door of Robert Summers's flat. It had been painted pale blue a long time ago. Someone had sprayed a crude graffito of male genitalia on it in black touch-up paint. Someone else – or perhaps it had been the graffiti artist – had tried to kick in its lower panel, which was chipped and splintered around three smashed dents. It was ajar, and light spilled around it. As I raised my hand to push it open, a voice from inside said, "You are welcome to enter, ghost eater, but know that you do so of your own free will."

There was a short corridor with a kitchen on one side and a bathroom on the other. Both were unspeakably filthy. The light came from the room at the end, which was lit by the pitiless glare of an unshaded hundred-watt bulb. There were no carpets, only stained and cracked chipboard. The wallpaper, pink and silver stripes, had been sprayed with scribbled tags and obscenities. It smelt of urine and unwashed bodies, and mouldy dampness. It smelt of despair. It was the most evil place I had ever been in. If not for the ghost of Mrs Stokes clinging to my back I would have turned around and fled to the safety of my house, never to come out again.

Robert Summers stood in the middle of the room, his hands laced before his crotch. He did not acknowledge

my entrance. He was as still as the man I had charmed. The harsh light shone off the bald patch on the crown of his head. He wore his expensive black suit. There was something wrong with his face. It was more wrinkled than I remembered, and seemed to have slipped, so that its bottom part rested on the collar of his stained white shirt.

Then I realized what it was. A mask. A mask made from the skinned face of Mrs Stokes.

Behind me, a man said, "You should not have come here, Mr Carlyle."

I turned. A man of medium height, his face masked by a trimmed beard and mirrored sunglasses, sat on a plastic chair of the kind sold as cheap patio furniture. He wore an impeccably tailored chalk-stripe suit, a Turnbull & Asser shirt, oxblood loafers. His shirt cuffs were fastened by onyx studs. There was a £10,000 oyster Rolex on his right wrist, and several heavy gold bracelets on his left. A circle had been drawn around him on the warped chipboard; even before I saw the black lamb dead in a corner I knew that the circle had been drawn with blood.

"Oh, I am well protected," the man said.

He had a cultivated voice, salted with an Eastern European accent. Lithuanian, perhaps, or Slovak. Although he was immaculately dressed and manicured, there was something indescribably filthy about him, as if an invisibly thin film of excrement covered him.

I held out my hand. "I am pleased to meet you, sir."

For a moment, I thought that he was about to stand up, but then he flattened his palms on the flimsy arms of the plastic chair and relaxed and smiled. "You know that I will not leave the circle."

"I do not know you."

The man's smile broadened. He placed the tips of his forefingers to the end of his neat beard. "Ah, it is not so easy to learn my name."

"Yet I believe you know mine."

"Then I have the advantage. I see that you have a companion."

"Your creature did not eat all of her."

"Eat? Ah. I see. No, he does not do what you do. You have made a grave mistake, Mr Carlyle. You really should not have come here. Why did you come here?"

"Mrs Stokes is my client."

"The poor thing which clings to you is not your client. It is merely all that is left of her."

I thought it better to say nothing. I could have walked out of the room. Mrs Stokes would stay, of course. In a way, she would become united with her daughter again, and so I would have fulfilled the conditions of my contract. Even now she was yearning towards Summers, as someone in the desert will stretch towards a handful of cool water. But if I let her go and left the room I knew that I could not stay in London. Perhaps there would be no place in the world which would be safe.

The man said, "I shall tell you why you are here. You came because you believe that you are the self-appointed spiritual guardian of the city. You believe that things must be always as they are, not as they should be. You hate change as much as the ghosts you fondly believe

are your charges. You came here because you are a fool who believes his own boasts. You are nothing but a tricked-out ghost eater who makes a living duping the bereaved. I am here because it is long past time for change. There are new things loose in the world, wonderful things."

I said unwillingly, "Lions and tigers and bears."

"Yes. Fierce wild creatures created by the unique pressures at the end of this century. It is not your century, Mr Carlyle. You do not belong here."

I said, "Summers is your creature."

"I found him." The man could not resist boasting. It was his fatal flaw. It was the fatal flaw of all his kind. He said, "He was never really alive. A shell of a man, a bundle of habits. His work was trivial and meaningless. He had no personal life. On weekends he would sit on the edge of the sagging bed in his greasy bedsit staring at the patch of sky visible beyond the chimneypots and hoping for escape. That was his strongest desire, and at last it turned inward. He vanished into himself. He became as empty as his bedsit, and a new tenant arrived."

"It is lonely, is it not? That is why it kills."

"It has no human weakness, Mr Carlyle. It kills because that is what it is. That is its power."

He said this in such a gloating way that I felt physically ill. But I knew that he was wrong. If it killed only for the sake of killing, it did not need to wear the faces of its victims. And I knew then that the man did not fully understand his creature.

He said, "What will you do, Mr Carlyle? Run away? But where will you run to? Try and hide? But your hiding place will not last forever. Join me? But I do not need your help. Try and run me through with that pig-sticker of yours. Go on. I know that you want to."

"I want to, but I will not. You are protected. But I will give you what you want."

And I released the ghost of Mrs Stokes.

She had been straining so hard to be released that it was a relief to let her go. She went with a joyful noise, as straight as an arrow.

I do not think that the man saw her – I do not think that he could see ghosts. He was sensitive to their presence, but that is not unusual. He was not interested in the matter of the dead, but only in power. The problem is not that the people do not believe, but that they believe in the wrong things, in numerology, spiritualism, tarot, crystals, and so on. As Lewis's devil remarked in *The Screwtape Letters*, the first step to damnation is to replace God with some other belief. The man's weakness was that he believed in his own power, but it is easy enough to find enough of the matter of the dead to dabble. The old necromancers were vain enough to write down their knowledge, and their encryption systems are no match for modern computers.

But knowledge and vain self-belief are not enough.

If the man did not see the poor woman's ghost, the Summers creature did. Its head snapped up and it yawned, showing stained false teeth, and gulped her down.

For a moment, nothing happened. The man clapped

his clean pink palms together in soft applause.

Then Summers tipped back his head and howled, and I knew that Mrs Stokes had found her daughter.

It was all she wanted; all that she had left behind was a single desire, hot and strong and vibrant. As sharp as a knife through cloth, she had cut through the ghosts the Summers creature had bound about itself, the ragged garment it had woven as a disguise or an attempt to become human. Now it burst apart.

It was as if a magnesium flare had been exploded in a cave full of bats.

For a moment the room was full of ghosts and other revenants. Behind me, the man screamed and screamed, but I hardly heard him. The light bulb blew in a flurry of brief sparks. Ghosts flew around me in the darkness. I like to think that I glimpsed Mrs Stokes and her daughter, but I cannot be sure. There were so many. And at the core of their whirling flight was the thing which had bound them, shaggy and black. It was not something new but something very old. I believe that it may have been prehistoric, some remainder of a shamanistic dream or ritual. How badly it wanted to be human! That is why it had killed, assembling a persona from fragments of the dead. I dispatched it and the ghosts fled in every direction.

There is not much left to tell. The man had buried his face in his hands. Blood leaked between his fingers. I could smell the stench of his voided bladder and bowels. I left him sitting within his protective circle and walked home alone.

In the next few days I learned from the newspapers of an increase in murders, suicides and other acts of violence. A man threw himself amongst the lions in Regent's Park Zoo; a woman set herself alight and jumped from Hungerford Bridge; another woman was found chewing on the stringy corpse of one of the ravens of the Tower of London.

It would pass, but I knew that things were changed. There were new and terrible things awake in the world, and not all of them belonged in the realm of the dead. For a very long time I had lived as if things had not changed, as if this great and terrible century was nothing more than a dream from which I would at last awake, free of the burden of my past, my own ghosts.

I knew now that no one could free me but myself. It was time to take up my own life, and walk freely in the city, amongst the living and the dead.

**Author's Note.** In 1999, a year or two after the events of this story, the Reading Room of the British Library has been closed and emptied; more Roman graves have been found close to Spitalfield's Market; and the Marquess Estate along Essex Road is being demolished.

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**Paul J. McAuley's** latest novel is the third volume of his highly-praised "Confluence" trilogy (Gollancz). His last two stories in *Interzone* were "Alien TV" (issue 142) and "Before the Flood" (issue 143). He lives in London.



Now that I have made my e-mail address (Gwestfahl@aol.com) available to *Interzone* readers via its new website (about which more at another time), and thus have invited you all into my home, I suppose I should say a few words about myself.

Not – you'll be thankful to hear – that there is much to say. As my 14-year-old daughter Allison perceptively notes, "Daddy, you have no life." During the daytime, twelve months a year, I teach credit and non-credit classes for two universities. At night, after a hard day, I simply veg out in front of the television watching baseball games or documentaries, refusing even to engage in conversation; after a not-so-hard day, I talk with my wife and children or do some reading and writing. On weekends, when I am usually relieved of other responsibilities, I work on future publications such as *Interzone* columns, this one being drafted on Saturday, August 7.

Visibly absent in my ongoing routine is anything resembling a social life, other than rare trips to the movies or the beach: I do not spend time with friends, I do not know my neighbours, I do not exercise, I do not go to restaurants or bars or sporting events, I appear to be completely alienated from my environment. As such, I exemplify what many regard as a growing societal problem.

For increasing numbers of Americans, like me, are avoiding the traditional social activities that long seemed essential to a functional community. As one indicator of this alarming trend, a Harvard professor studied the sharp decline in bowling leagues throughout the United States, concluding that this was evidence of a grave situation urgently demanding attention. Americans are devoting insufficient amounts of their free time to communal bowling! Can the Republic survive?

As my tone suggests, I was not inspired by this professor to rush out and join a bowling league to help repair America's tattered social fabric. Once, while working at a credit union, I actually joined its bowling team; and to me, the iterative experience of rolling a large ball down an alley again and again, and watching it roll back to you every time, is entertaining only momentarily as a technologically streamlined realization of the mythological torments of Sisyphus.

Bowling leagues? Sorry, I have better things to do with my time – which leads to my defence of an apparently sociopathic lifestyle.

Despite all appearances, you see, I don't *feel* as if I have a sociopathic lifestyle, entirely cut off from the world. On the job, I interact normally

# A Modem Utopia

or  
Why Allison's  
Boring Daddy  
Hopes the Machine  
Doesn't Stop

with colleagues and students; at home, I interact with family members and their friends. More to the point, there are many people that I socialize with *from a distance* – sometimes by letters or phone, but mostly by e-mail. A few of them are well known to *Interzone* readers. While my cybernetic correspondence with David Pringle typically focuses on business matters (such as, "Dear David, What is the last possible moment that I can send you my next column and have it published on time?"), we sometimes have more substantive conversations. John Clute checks in every few months or so with a question or news, and Paul Barnett (John Grant) has been talkative of late. But I don't wish to imply that I am particularly close to these luminaries, or that my correspondence exclusively involves luminaries; it is mostly people who are unknown to you but well worth knowing – professors and students and others devoted to science fiction – that I stay in touch with.

From my perspective, then, I am not anti-social at all; rather, I have found people to be sociable with who are more stimulating than those in my immediate vicinity.

Yet concerned professors, viewing my hours at the computer as a disturbing rejection of society, want to tear me away from the Internet and bring me into personal contact with people in my neighbourhood, to recreate an idealized American past of

community barn-raising, square dances, and quilting bees by means of contemporary equivalents like bowling leagues.

Well. Let's consider one of my neighbours, a man I can castigate without concern because there is not the slightest chance that he will ever learn of the existence of *Interzone*, let alone read an issue. As far as I can tell, the primary obsession of his life is washing his car. Every weekend, he stands in his driveway, spending hours devotedly scrubbing and polishing his car to a state of pristine beauty. When his teenage sons were part of the household, they were in the driveway too, washing their own cars, as the father schooled his sons in the proud family tradition of automotive cleanliness. And sometimes, no doubt, they would scornfully look across the street at my conspicuously filthy car, a sure sign of wrongheadedness and rampant moral decay.

So, what I am supposed to do? To bond with this man, should I spend my weekends washing my car too? As we both washed our cars, would he wander over to engage in engrossing discussions about the best products and techniques to make one's car most immaculate? Would the conversation then drift into other exciting areas, like current weather conditions or the changing fortunes of the local baseball teams? To further expand our hours for social contact, would we resolve to launch a bowling league?

Let's face it; neighbourhoods are random collections of people whom we may – or more likely, may not – particularly care for. Our ancestors built barns and danced and quilted with their neighbors not because they loved each other, but because they had no choice: they needed each other's labour, and had no one else to socialize with. Today, we can earn money to have somebody else build our houses and sew our quilts; we no longer require volunteers from across the glen to assemble basic necessities. Today, we can use communication networks to search the world to find the best possible people to socialize with; we no longer have to settle for the people who happen to live nearby.

Thus, it's not that I am *alienated* from my car-washing neighbour, my neighbour who belongs to the National Rifle Association, or my neighbour who cannot speak English; I am *liberated* from them. Instead of enduring the neighbourhood I happened into, I am allowed by modern technology to construct my own virtual neighbourhood, filled with far more interesting people than I can find by walking down the street. If you say that I am "cocooning" – prog-

Gary Westfahl

nosticator Faith Popcorn's term for people who spend all their time at home, surrounded by electronic devices – let's remember that there's a reason why caterpillars go into cocoons: to turn into butterflies. Had I remained solely in the company of the people that life threw in my path, I might have devolved into a beer-drinking cretin fuming about the lousy pitching of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and why can't Shaquille O'Neal learn to make a free throw? Instead, in part because of the people I have chosen to read and have chosen to communicate with, I developed into the erudite and fascinating irritant that I am today.

Of course, while science fiction friends constitute my most important virtual community, they are not the only one. Recently, I have been playing bridge online, anonymously interacting with players all over the world who enter and withdraw from games at any time as the mood strikes them. Less frequently, I consult with colleagues about teaching remedial math and English. No matter what you care about today, you can find a listserv devoted to it or can assemble your own circle of scattered companions.

And in this way, we have realized in an unexpected but spectacular fashion one of the dreams of science fiction.

When space habitats first became prominent, they were presented as a perfect solution to all social problems. To avoid conflicts with others, like-minded individuals could settle in their very own habitat, to be happily isolated from potentially irritating outsiders. There could be separate habitats for dedicated nudists, fanatical bridge-players, or hard-core Marxists. William Forstchen's *Into the Sea of Stars* envisioned 700 of these harmonious, homogenous enclaves, which leave the solar system to enjoy a peaceful existence far from Earth.

However, there was one problem with this plan, which is that people rarely fit comfortably into one group, and one group alone. Under the Forstchen system, what happens if you are a bridge-playing Marxist? You choose the bridge habitat, but the first time a partner trumps your ace, you start longing for some intellectual arguments with your Marxist friends; unfortunately, they are now heading for the Galactic Center while you are drifting towards the Lesser Magellanic Cloud. Even if you can make the switch, discovering that Marxists don't know how to finesse gives you second thoughts once again.

Now, with the Internet, you can join a community of bridge players and a community of Marxists, and

you can alternately interact with each of them anytime you wish, which provides much more flexibility than an array of space habitats. And what about those potentially irritating outsiders you'd like to avoid? Well, you can't put millions of miles of vacuum between you and them, but passing by their offices or occasionally seeing them in the supermarket isn't that troubling, and soon, with the growth of online employment and shopping, you may even eliminate that incidental contact.

In sum, free from the necessity of interacting only with those around us, free to seek out desirable people all over the world and craft our own cybernetic communities, contemporary people enjoy unprecedented opportunities to bond together in innumerable ways for mutual enrichment and enjoyment – a veritable virtual utopia. One prescient writer predicted all of this 90 years ago; strangely enough, he despised it.

In 1909, as a jaundiced response to H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, E.M. Forster published "The Machine Stops," which envisioned a future Earth governed by a vast Machine that delivers all of life's necessities to citizens living in private underground chambers and thus eliminates the need for travel or personal contacts between people:

For a moment, Vashti felt lonely.

Then she generated the light, and the sight of her room, flooded with radiance and studded with electric buttons, revived her. There were buttons and switches everywhere – buttons to call for food, for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorised liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which she communicated with her friends. The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that she cared for in the world.

Sounds good to me. But to Forster, this paradisaical existence represented despicable decadence, as humanity had lost contact with the real world and real people, and he gleefully describes the gradual cessation of the Machine's activities, which drives Vashti and her compatriots to the harsh environment on the surface where they can no longer survive – leaving Earth to be inherited by the hearty "Homeless" people who had previously escaped the Machine and adapted to the rugged outdoor life.

Forster's prophecy was flawed because he anticipated a Machine that would *force* people to remain

indoors and become dependent upon its contrivances for life support and communication, so that rebels like Vashti's son must surreptitiously struggle to regain access to athleticism and adventure. In fact, we now have a Machine which simply *allows* people to do these things. So, if the personal lifestyle I've described strikes you, like my daughter, as sterile and stifling, if you believe that networks of virtual comrades are shabby, ersatz substitutes for the energizing warmth of genuine personal contact, you remain perfectly free to spend your days hiking through the mountains with friends or bowling with your neighbours. All the activities and experiences ever known to humanity remain available to us today; what is different now is that we have the option of refusing to engage in them and the ability to succeed, and even prosper, while refusing to engage in them. And this is driving some people crazy.

Today, the Internet and other technological advances can empower talented individuals who happen to lack social or physical skills while disempowering individuals whose exclusive talents in social or physical skills make them less and less important in an online world. Since it is disheartening to be disempowered, the affected individuals may indulge in fantasies of worldwide destruction and degeneration that will confound all the pampered sissies now lording it over their betters and return control to the resourceful he-men who can take care of business in an unforgiving wilderness. Since the long-awaited nuclear holocaust of survivalist fiction now appears unlikely, these persons are focusing their hopes on the Y2K problem, dreaming that on January 1, 2000, our technological civilization will grind to a complete halt and force people like me under the thumb of people like my gun-toting neighbour, who will emerge as the natural masters of their reprimativized environment.

Fortunately, I very much doubt this will occur. In the course of human history, progress has sometimes come to a standstill, but it rarely goes in reverse. If the Machine does stop, we will have the knowledge and equipment to quickly rebuild it, and few will endorse Forster's call for its permanent destruction.

In the meantime, while the Machine is still running smoothly, it is time for me to push a button and instantly send these thoughts to a distant friend, thousands of miles away, and carry on with my blissfully boring life.

Gary Westfahl

The small-minded will always resent attainment, but they resent some classes of attainment more than others. To earn maximum loathing among the lumpen-culturati requires neither the towering talent nor the insufferable arrogance of an A. L. Rowse; even invincible vulgarity will only admit you to the second division, with Lady Docker, Billy Butlin and Hugh Hefner. No, for maximum umbrage you need to be hugely and lucratively popular with the lower-middle classes (social and intellectual); to glory in your good fortune; to have achieved it without obvious sweat; and to have incurred no angst on the way. That will propel you to the level of Jeffrey Archer, Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Maxfield Parrish — who cannot between them lay claim to one tenth of the *bien-pensant* odium heaped upon the 40th president of the United States of America.

That is the observation at the heart of Peter Delacorte's *Time on My Hands* (Phoenix, £6.99, B-format). Gabriel Prince, the hero, is loaned a time machine of doubtful provenance by Jasper Hudnut, a rabid anti-Reaganite, and sent back to 1938 with a single imperative: By whatever means, preserve America from the horrors of the Reagan White House! He goes equipped with a comprehensive list of racetrack winners, but more interestingly he's a cineaste. How better to track the young Reagan than to get a job as a scriptwriter and bring the likes of *High Noon* and *On the Waterfront* to premature birth in versions improved by hindsight?

Having established himself, Gabriel naturally falls in love with a starlet, and finds he rather likes the young Reagan. With Hudnut out of the way the book switches emphasis from satire to romance, but tension is enhanced by Delacorte's choice of the malleable time model; every time Gabriel uses the machine or his inside information, he increases his chance of invalidating it next time. The experienced reader will note that, though longer and more complex, this book is structurally and dynamically identical to L. Sprague de Camp's classic *Lest Darkness Fall* (1941) — and Gabriel is temperamentally very like Martin Padway. If Gabriel's errand is trivial compared to Padway's great mission, that is not to belittle him; Delacorte catches the mood of the late 90s, as de Camp did that of the early 40s, and to spend a long, lazy weekend reading one straight after the other would surely entertain, edify and refresh the most jaded of large-hearted men. The small-minded will hate it, of course, but that's their problem.

## An SF Hollywood Novel

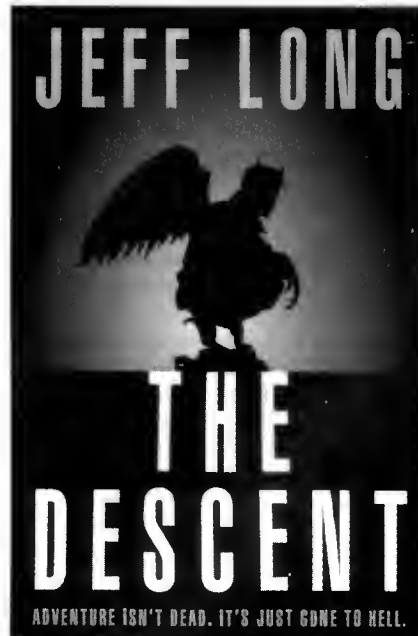
Chris Gilmore

The idea that Heaven and Hell exist on some other "plane" is relatively new. For the classical Greeks Elysium was literally accessible via Mount Olympus, and the Fortunate Islands lay to the west. Fifteenth-century Christians hoped to find Heaven beyond the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, and could they have read a modern description of conditions on Venus, they'd have known the place at once.

They'd also have found Jeff Long's *The Descent* (Gollancz, £9.99) a lot less odd than I did, for it's based on a very unlikely cocktail of anthropology, theology and geology. The central conceit, treated more as sf than fantasy, is that there exists throughout the



deeper layers of the Earth's crust an immense labyrinth of tunnels and caverns, all interconnected, and all in principle accessible, often by way of known cave systems. Being accessible they were accessed in pre-human times, and cousins of ours called the *hadal* (not, please, to be confused with *halal*; this is no anti-Islamic allegory) have evolved to enjoy conditions down there. Exactly how their food-chain works, without sunlight for a vegetable basis, is a questions that gets asked early on, and among the many which receive no adequate answer. Cannibalism and hunting expeditions to the surface are supplemented by a "sub-planetary biosphere," but the pri-



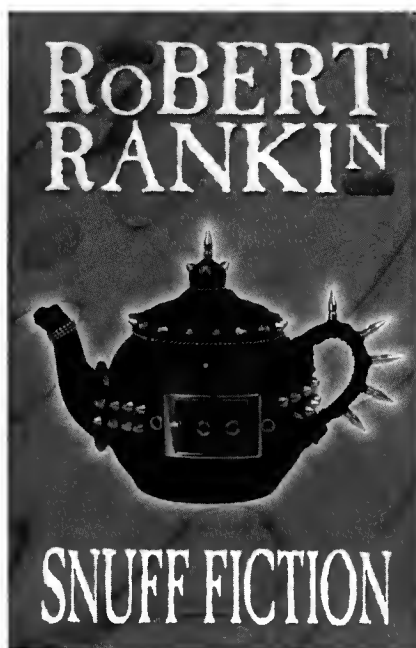
many energy-source remains undefined. There are other, worse, scientific absurdities, including the assertion that radio waves can meander for weeks through solid rock, or even be picked up before they're broadcast – a piece of ill-disciplined ornamentation which contributes nothing to the plot.

So what's holding it all up? Or who? Is the hadal realm actually Hell itself, and is Old Nick running the whole show as his infernal fief? It seems unlikely, yet a committee of the learned is probing that assumption; certainly, the few who have survived exposure to hadal culture describe an endless round of murder, mutilation and torture.

Predictably, the idea of human rights for hadals gains little favour, whereas the idea of exploring, exploiting and ultimately colonizing their space has strong appeal for C. C. Cooper, a billionaire entrepreneur. The parallels with James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* are obvious, even down to a Jesuit among the good guys, but the theological underpinning is a lot weaker, becoming least credible on the lips of Ali, Long's heroine. A beautiful, blonde proto-linguist, she wants to learn hadal speech and compare it to the human proto-language as reconstructed by computers. Nothing wrong with such a heroine, except that she's also a nun. Now, the first question one asks about nuns (real or fictitious) is: What dreadful wrong was done to her childhood, that she has resorted to such vows? For Ali the answer seems to be: not a lot. Her views on all topics are medium-strength feminist, and she has no inhibitions about bedding Ike, a survivor of hadal captivity, who is also accompanying Cooper's first major scientific expedition to the nether depths. In other words, Ali's nunhood is more ill-chosen ornamentation, gratuitous and vulgar.

The bulk of the book concerns the many gruesome misfortunes which befall the expedition, giving Long ample opportunity to display a mastery of *grand guignol*, regrettably not matched by an equal mastery of the language. Much of the writing is deplorable, being littered with sentences like: "It was a concept too fundamental for Branch to easily accept." Those detract fatally; while I enjoyed some of the setpiece descriptions, such abysmal slackness is intolerable. Long should find himself an editor.

Another month, another Robert Rankin novel. Reviewing *Nos tradamus Ate My Hamster* in *Interzone* 114, I commented that he was wearing his material a little thin, and needed to try something else. To my



great pleasure he has done so, and if the product isn't exactly new, it's no less welcome. In *Snuff Fiction* (Doubleday, £16.99) he has turned from the overtly fantastic to a playful form of satire. The opening paragraphs use the trope, much favoured in late-19th-century sf, where an old man decides, for no immediately apparent reason or audience, to recount the stirring events of his youth – in a version of our own times and a little later. As the principal *mise en scene* is Brentford you'll not be surprised to learn that the resemblance to everyday reality is scant. Contrariwise, another resemblance is very striking: whether by accident or design, Rankin has done for contemporary Britain what Milton Shulman did for 50s America in such works as *Barefoot Boy with*

*Cheek and Sleep Till Noon*, though many of the jokes are a lot ruder than Shulman ever attempted.

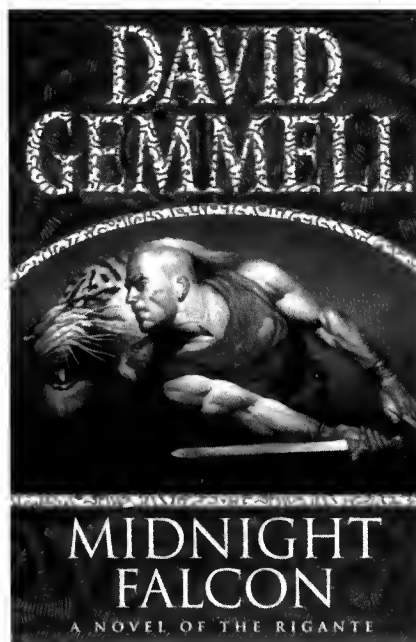
The narrator, Edwin, is an innocent who desires only a full belly and unlimited casual sex; but from his earliest years he becomes progressively entangled with Doveston, a young man whose ambitions begin with total control of the world and end with nothing less than godhead. He has a good idea of how to achieve both, moreover, with a strategy based on exploiting his encyclopedic knowledge of the tobacco industry – and Edwin, who serves him variously as catspaw, fall guy, interior decorator, biographer and ultimately nemesis.

Fantasy allows the writer to presume that the world works in ways other than those actually observed; for successful satire the writer must deploy exact knowledge of how the world works, however much he chooses to embroider it with fantasy elements. Rankin's notoriously varied experience of life has obviously imparted a serious appreciation of economics, and among the many excellent jokes in this book (mostly at the expense of sundry media celebs, including Elton John, Michael Jackson, Jeffrey Archer and Mariella Frostrup) one, unfortunately too long to quote here, really deserves to be reproduced in an economics exam, with an instruction to identify and expose the fallacies contained therein – and a note that those students who concentrate solely on the single, most obvious fallacy will be marked out of 50%.

Partly through the structure imposed by the *Bildungsroman*, but more, I suspect, in response to the demands of satire, *Snuff Fiction* is more tightly controlled than is usual with Rankin. I noticed only one, minor loose end, and the book actually reaches a morally and structurally satisfactory conclusion. Altogether, this is truly excellent departure for him, but (let me reassure his fans) – no huge departure: there are still traditions, old charters and dark doings among the allotments, and the Flying Swan still serves all comers, all day.

Someone, someday will earn a PhD by working out which of the similarities to be noted among writers of heroic fantasy derive from direct influence, and which from the *anima mundi*, *cloaca maxima*, convention-generated gossip or pure coincidence. As a reviewer I wish him good fortune, while noting that in *Midnight Falcon* (Bantam, £16.99), David Gemmell is overlapping the trademark territory of Guy Gavriel Kay.

No reason why he should not, but in doing so he invites a direct comparison, and it must be said at once that







he has nothing like Kay's range as a writer; he's good at physical suspense and emotionally charged dialogue, but often flounders out of his depth. Then we get sentences like, "Expensive rugs adorned the mosaic floor, and there were a dozen beautifully crafted couches set around the walls." Daisy Ashford (or J. M. Barrie) could get away with that sort of thing in *The Young Visitors*, but woe betide whoever plays it straight.

The story concerns Banouin and Bane, two young gentlemen of the Rigante, a Keltoi (Celtic) tribe who, partly by chance, partly by choice, find themselves at Stone (1st-century Rome) in the contrasting roles of scholar-healer and rising-star gladiator. Stone is an uncomfortable city, being stiff with delators eager to denounce to the Red Priests of the City cult actual or potential adherents of The Source – on slender evi-

dence or none. It is also politically unstable, lying under the joint sway of the ageing, childless military genius Jasaray, and the sickly, malignant theocrat Nalademus. Either may die at any moment, and thereby precipitate the chaos and hysteria of a succession crisis – not that Bane could give a fig, for he is single-mindedly intent on honing his skills to the point where he can despatch Voltan, commander of the secular arm of the Red Priests and murderer of the girl who should have been the great love of his life.

Banouin has troubles of his own, though being of an existential sort they evoke much less sympathy. I record this with regret; Gemmell effects a successful tension between the man of physical passion and the man of intellectual ardour, but fails completely to evoke a moral equivalence. Worse is to follow, when he con-

demns a heroine to death in circumstances where the sentence makes no sense, purely so that she can be rescued; worst of all, he repeats the tyro's error he perpetrated in *Legend*: he falls in love with a character he has killed, and *brings her back to life*. A pity, and more than a pity, as the book has more serious philosophical pretensions than usual and parts of it are equal to anything Gemmell has yet attempted. But the whole is without integrity; fling together the finest materials anywhere to so shoddy a plan, and the result could only be an embarrassing mess. Gemmell has obviously noticed, for he brings it to a hasty and abrupt conclusion by means of one of the most unconvincing battles in fiction. He obviously needs a new direction, and I hope he succeeds as well as Rankin in finding it.

Chris Gilmore

True, the real weather has been kind to us of late; but it's almost as if a *different* sort of rainy season has come to a recent close. Skies are suddenly smiling with relief, for the Jungle of Genre has been monsooned clean, and the rain has encouraged strange growths. Everything is bright, fresh; the colours seem unusual. New, juicy fruit is on the trees... Notwithstanding what cynics and cry-baby commentators proclaim, there are *always* good books being published; but to my mind it seems that some exceptional work has lately been made available. The Jungle is pregnant with Colour, Time, and with Dream, just as a good jungle should be.

One root in this jungle is Doris Lessing's recent novel, *Mara and Dann* (Flamingo, £16.99). It is dry, and it's hard, and it's brown. The setting is Ifrik, a future version of Africa, where Lessing lived during her childhood. The eponymous characters begin the book as children. To begin with, Mara (or the girl who becomes known as Mara) is clearly the dominant partner, and she is only seven years old. She might not comprehend much, but she recognizes the value of a cuddle, and she administers them to an exhausted younger brother. The two have been rescued from the palace after a coup, and are told they must lose their old names and answer only to "Mara" and "Dann." They have had adult concerns thrust upon them.

This novel makes the continent of Africa seem more hostile and distant than Lessing has made it seem before. Humanity has dried into the dirt. Insects do more than sting. Drought and war have killed many; but someone is on the children's side. The reader follows the author's no-

## Colour, Time and Dream

David Mathew

nonsense language, and follows the children, who are unaware of their importance and are confused as to why anyone should have saved their skins; they are whisked north, soon thirsty, through the dust and animal bones, and through their terror. The early section is astonishing; few writers can match Lessing's grasp of *how* children fear. Images of them wilting in the heat are haunting, as are descriptions of the pain of micturition following likely damage to the kidneys caused by a lack of fluid; or the goat that licks the children's necks, desperate for salt. The children are looked after, or at least kept

company and given scraps of information, by an old lady whose body, before long, is unable to take the strain. Roots are eaten and water is gasped-for by all, and even after a flash-flood, a sense of doom pervades.

"There were people once," Dann says years later, after he has run away and then returned for his sister, "they knew everything." Mara and Dann, no longer children, tread their way, sometimes literally, through the bones of the past. "They knew about the stars. They knew... they could talk to each other through the air, miles away..." Books and telephones have no place in this adventure; the creature comforts have been boiled away. Near the end of the novel, however, Dann says, "Could we just stop talking about the past?" This is uttered after innumerable hardships have been suffered as they've made their way north...

Always north. They barter for the use of transportation – which they need to carry them north. They meet tribes of dark-skinned people, whom they think look the same – while they are travelling north. Why north? "On the map that has the Ice all over the north of the world, the north part of Ifrik is not brown, the way it is on the globe, because before the Ice it was all desert – all the north of Ifrik was a desert." They want to shrug off the shackles of dirt and drought. Their childhoods have become exercises in self-sufficiency, and preservation is the key now they have seen so many die. "The farther south, the worse," Dann remarks. "The farther north, the better. There's water up there. It still rains there. There is a big desert, they say, and it is drying everything around its edges, but you can go around it." By this point, roles have

been reversed. Dann's ideas are taken seriously; whereas Mara has the onset of menstruation and a fear of pregnancy to overcome in addition to their customary burdens.

The characters in *Mara and Dann* are well-drawn, and the writing is barbed and painful. The reader works and sympathizes, enjoys and fears; furthermore, the reader wants the rain to fall. Dust is at the back of the throat and in the eyes. *Mara and Dann* is a long, involving narrative and the sense of stalled relief is regularly difficult to breathe.

The future portrayed in Eugene Byrne's *ThiGMOO* (Earthlight, £5.99) is altogether more prosperous, cerebral, electric, and is squelchy with the consumer-sex society (international) that it describes. The novel is based on the good idea that a university's technological know-how (the University of Wessex, coincidentally enough, given the next reviewed book in this column) might produce A.I.s in the form of fictional characters ("erams") who will explain various facts about the past to anybody interested: a programme of interactive learning. Cue the historical tart, Nelly Cocksedge (she likes her booze and pig's trotters), or the pornographer, or the radical.

The problems is, the system gets invaded: "We should have foreseen that sooner or later someone would make a serious attempt to enter the system and cause damage, either in the name of some religious or ideological cause, or just for sheer devilment. As it happened, the first zealots to try and convert our erams were freelance Mormons." Violence flares up. The Museum of the Mind closes down... ThiGMOO stands for This Great Movement of Ours; and a new world order is burgeoning. Life is changing.

"To read a bad review of one's work is worse than waking up to find one has a large boil on one's posterior." This is the novel's penultimate sentence, leaving the reviewer wondering what the anatomical equivalent of a good review might be. On second thoughts, I don't want to know. *ThiGMOO* is cheeky and playful. Byrne's advice on how to read individual sections is nicely handled, and makes the book feel something like an interactive experience itself. For example: "To have some idea of the environment of an eram at this time, you would be best advised to take a combination of drugs which are illegal and which the author therefore cannot recommend. Try to imagine, if you can, having no physical perception at all and no nerve endings; you feel no pain or sensual pleasure." By connecting the future with the reader's past,

the book neatly clips away the present, leaving the reader stranded – quite pleasantly, actually. The present seems redundant; there is no need for references to our contemporary culture. The solving of successive difficulties in the narrative becomes all.

In 1979, Christopher Priest published *An Infinite Summer*, which contained, *inter alia*, "Whores," "The Negation" and "The Watched." Now, in 1999, he has published *The Dream Archipelago* (Earthlight, £5.99), in which the same stories and others ("The Equatorial Moment," "The Cremation," "The Miraculous Cairn") appear. So, it's not so much a new collection as a reshuffle; but as a volume of interconnected short stories and novellas it's akin to what the author mentioned in the introduction to the earlier volume: "... a loosely linked cycle of stories I think of as 'the Dream Archipelago'... more an idea than an actual place, but if it has a correlative reality then it would be a kind of fusion of the Channel Islands and Greece, with bits of Harrow-on-the-Hill and St Tropez thrown in for good measure."

Furthermore, with a war taking place elsewhere, the Dream Archipelago is timeless, because dream is like addiction or madness: it's a way of stepping *outside* time: "With a sense of future removed the past became irrelevant and those who came to the Archipelago, choosing the permanence of neutrality, made a conscious decision to abandon their former lives." It is also often senseless: a place made from thought and wasps and honey, where a visit to a prostitute can result in more than a

dose of the pox ("Whores"); or where a visiting writer can change a young fan's life forever ("The Negation"). The fan, a soldier, finds an alternative sort of conflict shortly afterwards. "The Watched" takes voyeurism into new areas, which by the very nature of the subject might seem unlikely; but it's not the act of surveillance upon another's daily activities that has evolved, but the means for doing so.

Imagine a recurring dream of a place. The first time, the structure and colour sequences will probably be unfinished, or will seem so. The second time, you start to reshad and deepen the textures; and by the third visit, you are painting, sloppily, outside the lines. There's something messy and unfinished, as there is (and I mean this as a compliment) with Priest's collection. It does not feel like a polished construct; there is something *involuntary* about *The Dream Archipelago*. Arthur Machen once said, "One dreams in fire, and one works in clay," but Priest dreams in fire and works in dream. His rages are red and his violence is blue, but the anger portrayed is not the usual variety of anger either.

Conflict, or at least encounter, solidifies the lives of Priest's characters. In *The Dream Archipelago* (and elsewhere, notably of late in *The Prestige*), Priest writes well of male loneliness and longing. His principal characters are males, and although they push out their chests from time to time (as the visiting mourner does in the manners-and-voodoo of "The Cremation"), their lives are full of holes – full of absences they don't recognize, or acknowledge, until the force, or a force, invades and fills. This force is frequently female, and not necessarily violent. The masculine is spared and filled up by the feminine.

A reshuffle or not, *The Dream Archipelago* is one of the important books of 1999. In more ways than one, it's a desert-island book.

An anthology containing stories dealing with turn-of-the-century London might be dense with fog and eerie with the occasional splash of lamplight. A natural phenomenon, in other words, strangling out the artificial. But the stories in Stephen Jones's anthology *White of the Moon* (Pumpkin, £16.99) are modern, and the natural phenomenon of the moon – its light and the madness it produces – leaks through the pages, unstoppably.

As with its predecessor, *Dark of the Night*, which I also liked, the line-up is predictable and the quality is high. The Christopher Fowler story, "Home Again," is rather weak to kick things



off, but by the time we arrive at the fourth story, "Agatha's Ghost" by Ramsey Campbell, things are really starting to swing. A woman believes that her nephew (who is in his mid-40s, or would be) is haunting her. She phones a radio show to see if they can help, but the solutions offered are not entirely what she had in mind.

Other standouts are "You Don't Have to Be Mad..." by Kim Newman, which among other things, has a man literally laughing himself to death. There's "Another Frame" by Joel Lane, in which a man goes to Amster-

dam to live the high life – good food, strong drink, the sex trade – having left behind the woman he's killed and raped (in that order). This story has a genuinely unexpected ending. Nicholas Royle's "The Roundabout" shows how bad a reading-and-signing session can be, and there is a world-class story from Paul McAuley, "I Spy", my personal favourite of his since "Crossroads." In this frightening and dirty tale of a man who achieves invisibility and goes on to use it, the lines are stretched as tight as guitar strings, and the scream is there, if you

want to hear it. Exceptional.

Despite the occasional lucky-dip attitude towards apostrophes (now you see it, now you don't), this is another great volume from Jones. How many that is in a row I wouldn't like to hazard a guess... but it's a lot. And the way that Pumpkin produces its books should also be mentioned. I like the typeface the publisher uses. Anything that adds to one's enjoyment of a book, however seemingly unimportant, should be congratulated, should it not?

David Mathew

Maybe it's global warming or El Niño but this year is turning out very strange indeed. The latest Dozois anthology – *The Year's Best Science Fiction, Sixteenth Annual Collection*, edited by Gardner Dozois (St Martin's Press, \$27.95 hb, \$17.95 pb; Robinson, £9.99) – is responsible for two bizarre occurrences. First, although we Neils have generally given his best-ofs a fairly grudging recommendation for the last few years, this time both of us came away basking in the warm glow of a long book that delivered very enjoyable reading, low on duds and with some very strong work. Second, and much weirder (and quite a surprise to both of us after several years of tandem reviewing) we experienced some pronounced critical divergence – so pronounced that we couldn't manage to paper it over to reach our customary Neilsian consensus. Admittedly this divergence only involved two stories – but where one of us Neils thought them (a) impenetrable and (b) so-so, the other Neil rated them amongst the top handful of stories in the entire book.

First off, let's deal with the vast bulk of stories that we did agree on. Bookending the anthology are two writers we esteem. Greg Egan's opener, "Oceanic," is set in a densely textured, richly detailed world, and has hard science taking second place to an exploration of issues of faith and the loss of. Mature writing perhaps, but it is also long and slow-paced and, while it does pay off in the end it's perhaps only the strength of the Egan name that keeps you turning the pages. A rather daunting intro to the anthology.

In the hefty closing story, "The Summer Isles," Ian MacLeod wrings out something fresh and original from an alternative WW2 history. The plot is neat, the ideas teasingly slide away from the obvious directions, and every line has been polished until you can see life reflected in it. As with so much of MacLeod's writing, it deals predominantly with sadness and loss, but painted so convincingly from

## A Very Odd Year

Neil Jones &  
Neil McIntosh

human experience that the effect is curiously empathic and uplifting and it's as strong a finish to the collection as could be hoped for.

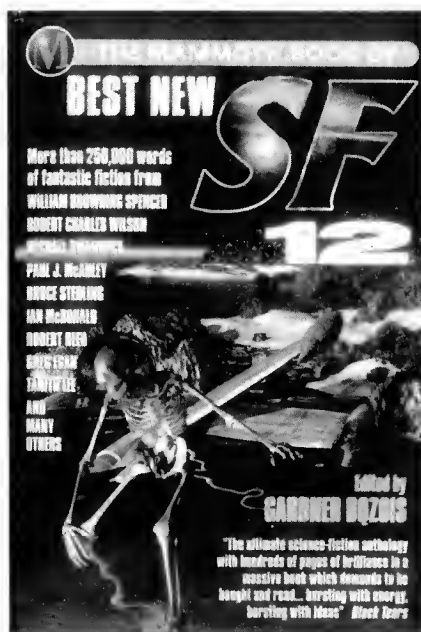
In between those two we have another of our favourites, Bruce Sterling, with the impressive "Taklamakan," which delivers audacious

leaps of the imagination executed with his usual aplomb strung onto a storyline – hi-tech DIY espionage meets nightmare experiment marinated too long – that few writers could pull off. A sighting of Robert Reed's byline, by contrast, has usually set our "earnest but dull" alarm flashing. Happily, "The Cuckoo's Boys," while long, is also a very good read in which nature fights it out with nurture and we get an exploration of the scope of the human imagination as well.

Now for a couple of (we agree) standout stories: William Barton's "Down in the Dark," a convincing evocation of Saturn's moons and some very alien life forms and, more importantly, a vivid picture of the way space explorers might end up when the Earth is gone and life continues in the face of despair. It's about, above all, the human will to survive even when, apparently, there's little to survive for. Then the brief, brilliant "Divided by Infinity" by Robert Charles Wilson, which is a fresh neat take on alternate universes that starts out sedate then twists kaleidoscopically.

If you can buy into the essentially absurd idea of an alien scouring junk sales for cowboy memorabilia, you'll enjoy "Craphound" by Cory Doctorow. Although set in the near future, it's tugging the strings of an all-but-vanished American past in this glorious rummage through the history of kitsch. Jim Grimley's "Free in Asveroth" is an elegiac tale of the hunted and their human hunters, a small story beautifully written. And from Britain, we have Gwyneth Jones's memorably enigmatic "La Cenerentola" and "Voivoidoi" by Liz Williams, which has a vaguely *X-Files* plot – genetic experiments gone wrong in Eastern Europe – and writing of great poise and quality which promises even better things to come.

There's hard sf from Geoffrey A. Landis, who plays skilfully with black holes and the nature of identity in "Approaching Perimelasma," and Paul J. McAuley, whose "Sea Change,



Note: We do not have the American cover, so we have used the English. Unfortunately, the English publishers use a different numbering system. The contents are, however, identical.



with Monsters" is a chilly suspense story that is played out on a well-evoked war-ravaged Europa. And it's a thumbs-up, too, for Michael Swanwick's "The Very Pulse of the Machine," in which a desperate trek on hellish Io leads to a baroque sf-ian denouement. More sedate but still successful is Allen Steele's sentimental Santa-on-Mars story, "Zwarte Piet's Tale."

There are some disappointments. Howard Waldrop's "US" replays the life of Charles Lindbergh's son three different ways. It's well-researched but, at least to us two Brits, curiously lifeless. Tanith Lee's "Jedella Ghost" is more fairy tale than science fiction – which, after all, is what this collection is labelled – and, anyway, the mix of whimsy and realism just isn't that successful.

Two long stories outstay their welcome. In Stephen Baxter's Nivenesque novella "Saddlepoint: Roughneck," the society of his future Japanese-settled moon is barely sketched in, and while the hard science is ingenious, his two lead characters (one of whom seems to have

just wandered in from a collaboration by Heinlein and Margaret Thatcher) just aren't engaging enough to draw you into the plot. Still, at least with Steve Baxter you can always work out what the plot is. Not so with Tony Daniel's impenetrable "Grist," which, if we'd been able to work out what it was all about, we might well have liked. Daniel can write, but if he's determined to turn out stories with this much sf encryption, he's never going to appeal to a mass audience. Or us.

Then there are the inevitable fillers – good quality, but fillers nonetheless. William Browning Spencer's "The Halfway House" – VR, screwed-up, streetwise protagonist – is slick, perhaps too slick. And Chris Lawson's "Unborn Again" is a dark, competent but unexceptional tale of tissue recipients getting more than they bargained for. Rob Chilson's "This Side of Independence" has Earth being disassembled by off-world colonists while a last few hold-outs refuse to leave: readable but slender. Cherry Wilder's "The Dancing Floor" again is professional and, other than it being set on

an artificial habitat, hard to remember much about. Oh, and there's also a short ponderous Ursula Le Guin story which fits snugly into the well-written-but-dull category.

Which brings us, finally, to those two consensus-shattering stories. One of us found "The Days of Solomon Gursky" by Ian McDonald intimidatingly hard to follow, while the other thought this capsule history of the universe, seen through one man's eyes, a brilliant *tour de force*. And again, where one of us found "Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang unexceptional, the other thought it a compelling and deeply moving look at the consequences of knowing exactly what the future inevitably holds for someone very dear to you.

But what is truly astonishing is that for both of us, no matter how we rated these last two stories, this collection still clocks in as a solid sf reading package, a strongly recommended way of investing both your money and your time – and the best Dozois best-of in a long while. Now ain't that something?

Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh

In a parallel universe, a switched-on movie producer was so struck with Stephen Baxter's novel *Voyage* that he decided to film it. It didn't happen in our universe, alas, but we do have the next best thing, namely a Dirk Maggs audio adaptation (BBC Radio Collection, 2 tapes, 2 hours 30 minutes, £8.99). Maggs has been making a name for himself recently with such well-received radio plays – or "audio movies" – as *Gemini Apes*; this latest venture will do nothing to tarnish his reputation.

For those who have not read the book – or the review in *Interzone* 116 – *Voyage* describes the space programme as it probably would have been if we'd decided to go to Mars in the mid-1980s instead of developing the space shuttle. Covering the period from the first Moon landing to the first Mars landing, it centres around the character of Natalie York (played by Laurel Lefkow), geologist and would-be astronaut at a time when there were no women astronauts.

*Voyage* is a long, complex novel with a lot of technical detail; no one could expect to encapsulate the whole thing in an adaptation consisting of five half-hour episodes. Of necessity, one or two interesting storylines are largely ignored, and one particularly moving scene – the confrontation between a scientist and his former Nazi master – is somewhat muted. What's remarkable is just how much does make it into the audio movie, and where it doesn't quite contain the depth of the book, it at least hints at

it. We get the sense of a slightly different history unfolding, the human dramas, the tragedy of Apollo-N, and above all the climactic landing on Mars – a truly wonderful sequence. Also remarkable is the fact that Maggs's astronauts are really speaking into paper cups and flying to Mars in a Renault – once again demonstrating the budgetary benefits

of audio sf.

For those of us longing to see a human being walk on Mars in our lifetimes, this might well be as close as we get. Unreservedly recommended.

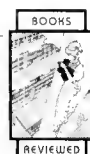
Back in the mid-1950s, radio writer Charles Chilton did a take on the exploration of the Moon and Mars. The result was the phenomenally popular cliffhanger-ridden trilogy of serials, *Journey Into Space*. All three adventures are readily available as digitally remastered tape sets from the BBC: *Operation Luna* (4 tapes, 5 hours 25 minutes, £12.99), *The Red Planet* (4 tapes, 7 hours 25 minutes, £12.99), *The World in Peril* (4 tapes, 8 hours, £12.99); boxed set (12 tapes, 20 hours 50 minutes, £35).

Over four decades on, it's easy to see why it was such a success. In *Operation Luna*, square-jawed hero Jet Morgan and his trusty three-man crew make the first landing on the Moon, encountering an advanced alien race along the way. They end up in some exotic places, but their passive role makes this the least exciting adventure of the trilogy. By contrast, *The Red Planet* hits the ground running; a doomsday after-the-fact report makes it clear that our heroes have taken a pasting, and their safe return from Mars is by no means guaranteed. The evocation of the planet is quite magnificent, and there are many great moments, including the scene where Jet makes the brutal decision to abandon a group of

## More Audio SF

Paul Beardsley





abductees to their fate. Those screams linger in the mind... Also effective is the running use of an old-fashioned song which the astronauts inexplicably hear whenever they sleep; this builds up to a very eerie climax. *The World in Peril* follows on directly, and answers all the questions raised in the previous adventure. It's a little overlong, and the big revelation is not exactly startling, but the ending is pleasingly elegiac. Oh, and we get to hear a sung version of "The Green Hills of Earth."

From the same era – the Golden Days of Radio, as the blurb would have it – are featured four half-hour stand-alone sf plays in the collection *X-Minus One* (Hodder Headline Audiobooks, 2 tapes, 2 hours, £8.99). In "The Man in the Moon" a radio operator questions his sanity when he receives a distress call from 240,000 miles away. Cue the routine conspiracy. "The Martian Death March" is set in 1997, on a Mars reminiscent of

Leigh Brackett's. The similarities between Westerns and pulp sf are poignantly exploited here, as the native population are herded into reservations by the settlers from Earth. "Almost Human" by Robert Bloch, is a surprisingly dull robotic take on the Frankenstein story. "The Girls From Earth" is a mildly amusing account of a dating agency on Mars.

In James Follett's *Earthsearch 2* (BBC Radio Collection, 4 tapes, 5 hours, £16.99), set four years after the events in *Earthsearch*, the four crew members of the starship *Challenger* have given up the search for their home planet and are raising children on an oddly familiar blue-green world instead. But their travels are far from over. The *Challenger* has returned, and this time the ship's intelligent computers are not so easily dealt with.

One particularly pleasing aspect of this serial is that you never know how long the crew are going to be plagued by any particular problem. Some are

routinely dealt with; others last several episodes. The biggest problem of all is never solved – when the crew come out of suspended animation to discover their children have grown up, they just have to learn to cope with it. Good stuff.

To my mind, *Blake's 7* is a TV series better remembered fondly than resurrected. Nevertheless, some of the original cast got together to perform in two rather similar BBC radio stories written by Barry Letts: *The Sevenfold Crown* (2 tapes, 1 hour 50 minutes, £8.99) and *The Syndeton Experiment* (1 CD, 1 hour, £7.99). The science is wine-inducing, as is the plotting; it's bad enough that Tarrant somehow forgets to wear his teleport bracelet, worse when we learn that Servelan's plans required him to make such an unlikely slip-up. Still, if you can cope with the idea of Avon being whipped by Servelan, it's mildly entertaining.

Paul Beardsley

Fiction about humanity in the last age of the world is quite recent. Even in classical times it was obvious that the Universe was far larger than the earth, and tales about a plurality of inhabited worlds in space go back to Lucian of Samosata. But a realization of the immensity of time only dates from Lyell and Darwin, and its first important treatment was *The Time Machine*.

You could make a fair case that every story about the earth under a red, dying sun derives from those few pages we all remember: the beach, the crabs, the swollen, flopping thing. But you could make a better case for Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth*, which was the book which redefined the genre as fantastical and magical, rather than science-fictional and rational. And though most people don't know it, Vance got his inspiration from a yet earlier writer: Clark Ashton Smith, a *Weird Tales* pulp giant, who wrote some really exquisite cosmic poetry in the 1920s, and went on to create a double handful of lushly-written short fictions whose tone and treatment hover halfway between poetry and prose. Some of these stories concerned "that Far-Future continent called Gyndron by some and Zothique by others, which is to rise millions of years hence in what is now the South Atlantic..." and Zothique, the abode of necromancies and magic, is the true grandfather via Vance of all subsequent entropic fictions, including Moorcock's *End of Time* and Wolfe's *Urth*.

The book under review is *The Last Continent* (Shadowlands Press, \$60). It purports to be a series of new stories set in Smith's Zothique, and it seems to

## Red Suns, Ashen Moons

Andy Robertson

be taking itself seriously – it is beautifully produced and bound, and priced to make a profit (and there is an even more expensive leatherbound edition we have not seen). And there is some very good stuff here. Gerard Houarner's leading story, "To Wake the Dead in Nypholos," has the true feel, despite its pedestrian title. It is told from the point of view of the dead servant of a wizard, threatened by a witch who seduces him and infects his realm with real, natural, organic life. Fundamentally this story is about the grief of the dead, even when – especially when

– they are victorious: amazingly, it makes us side with its undead protagonist against the carrier of life. It is beautifully written and could stand beside the best of Smith's own tales. Gene Wolfe produces an effective oddity, a hard-sf take that might be set in a real desert continent whose legends are the tales of Zothique; Stableford's "The Light Of Acheron" is equally good, though its plot permutations go on a little too long and have a touch of the mechanical; and Rhys Hughes creates a truly curious entertainment.

The other stories are of widely varying quality, and many of them suffer from crude over-use of visceral horror and sex. It is a miracle how they manage to do this while describing a continent that is supposed to be a vortex of unnatural miscegenations, necrophilia, incest and torture. Death and pain should not become less terrible by being nearly universal, or less feared because they are soon to be totally victorious, but clumsy overwriting can make it seem that way.

I think that the real problem is a lack of understanding of the work they are supposed to be imitating. Smith's original stories were tragedies in the pure classical sense. They followed the downfall of one central figure who was guilty of pride, cruelty, betrayal, unnatural lust, offending the gods, or bad luck. The sorcerers and ghouls were spectre-robed mechanicals, not protagonists (and certainly not buffoons). Smith was a master of both erotic and horrific writing, but he knew the virtues of understatement, and so doom was not always consummated by bodily destruction. Some ended like Xeethra,

who was not taken to hell in the body because he had been bought to the point where his soul belonged to Zothique's devil wherever his flesh might be. And while sexual love (an important spring of tragedy) was a vital part of Smith's stories it was not debased to pornography or obscenity – not for moral reasons, but because pornography and obscenity are comic, not tragic.

Of the stories which do *not* totally fail to understand this, one may give honourable mention to Charlee Jacob's "The Leper King," which is flawed only by a certain girlishness; to David Niall Wilson's "The Temple Of Captured Gods," which attempts a bit more than it can manage but fails nobly; to Geoff Cooper's "Jolerarymi's

Rose," which falls down again and again but manages to keep a core of integrity; to Polagaya Fine's "The Judgement of Tsaran," which is a bit abstract for my taste but more than good enough; and to a few others. The remainder are mostly readable but simply fail to take themselves (or Zothique) seriously enough, and there are a couple of real stinkers which out of charity I will not name.

This is an anthology which contains some splendid work but which would have been improved by pruning. I enjoyed it, I applaud it, but I suspect it will find a market among specialist Smith fans rather than general readers. Indeed the ordinary reader would do better to spend the equivalent of \$60 getting hold of Smith's original

stories – as I'm sure the editors of this book would be the first to agree.

(A postscript: I have traced the "dying earth" genre back to Smith via Vance, but there was an earlier and equally forgotten writer whose two greatest books obviously derive straight from *The Time Machine*. I refer to William Hope Hodgson. *The Night Land* and *The House on the Borderland* contain some of the most powerful fantastic ideas and images that have ever been written down, but they are buried by the awful pseudo-archaic writing style. They need not stay forgotten: when is someone going to commission an anthology called *Night Lands*?)

Andy Robertson

Even Isaac Asimov was nervous about continuing with his original Foundation Trilogy (a saga acclaimed enough to win a 1966 Hugo for "Best All-Time Series"), yet eventually he wrote four more Foundation books before he died in 1992. Others have since taken up the reins, so now we come to *Foundation's Triumph* (Orbit, £16.99) by David Brin, the third and final book of the Second Foundation Trilogy.

Janet Asimov, Asimov's widow, and Ralph Vicinanza, Asimov's estate representative, approached Greg Benford with the idea of a new Foundation Trilogy. Benford took up the challenge, and together with fellow hard-sf writers Greg Bear and David Brin, he developed new ideas that would carry forward Asimov's creation. They understood that the original series was fundamentally an exploration of human destiny and have continued with this theme, whilst following Asimov in tying his Robot and Foundation novels closer together. During the 1940s, Asimov had deliberately kept the Robot and Foundation stories apart. He wanted "two strings to his bow" – if his readers (or himself) tired of one of them, he always had the other one to fall back on with a minimum of overlap. By *Robots and Empire* (1985) however, Asimov had decided to fuse the two series into one, a process completed with this novel by David Brin.

Brin takes up the tale begun by Benford in the first of this current series, *Foundation's Fear* (1997) and continued by Bear in *Foundation and Chaos* (1998). Once more we meet Hari Seldon, this time just after he has finished taping the messages for the Time Vault on Terminus – scenes which play such a memorable role in Asimov's novels.

Seldon's life is drawing to a close, along with the gap in the narrative before Asimov's original Foundation

stories begin – yet Brin sends our frail hero off on a final adventure across the galaxy. A seemingly minor mystery sparks off a new quest for Seldon – a welcome distraction for him now that his main work on psycho-history and the Foundation is done. As in the previous books by Benford and Bear, Seldon is soon caught up in the conflicting conspiracies of robots and humans, but Brin's plot rapidly develops into a series of revelations concerning the roots of the Robot and Foundation universe. Indeed, the book almost reads like one long denouement. Nothing wrong with that, but combined with meeting so many of the characters from the last book in this series, Brin has really written Part 2 to Bear's *Foundation and Chaos*,

rather than a stand-alone novel.

Readers exhausted by the convolutions and incorporations of so many books will be delighted to find a comprehensive, well-referenced Timeline at the end of this volume.

Brin's insight into the unique position of Hari Seldon, as the human most aware of the vast galactic sweep of history, from pre-space travel Earth into a psychohistorically plotted future, allows him to demonstrate that Seldon is the umpire of humanity – the man most suited to judge the alternative paths of human destiny. Yet no answers are given here, only dialogue between ideas.

Perhaps this has been at the root of readers' fascination with the Foundation series throughout the years. To debate the optimum structure of human society has been the subject of religious inquiry, yet here we find it at the core of an sf series. Asimov himself posited the group-mind solution of Gaia, a transcendence of humanity's problems by changing the nature of humans themselves. In this he paralleled his great rival Arthur C. Clarke in what many feel is Clarke's greatest book *Childhood's End* (1953). This Second Foundation Series has taken the debate further, replacing a Toynbeeian "Study of History" and collective "Great-Plan" endeavour with a Darwinian "Freemarket" solution for humanity, where risk and responsibility must be reintroduced for the necessary growth and maturity of our species.

But the debate never ends. Like Asimov, Brin has wisely left some questions unanswered, a few plot threads untied, yet they do not frustrate. Perhaps he expects that this series will be continued by others, presumably if sales are high enough. I only hope that the excellent standard set by the Second Foundation Trilogy will be maintained.

Nigel Brown

## Foundation and Umpire

Nigel Brown

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Barker, Clive. **Galilee**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-617805-7, 804pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1998; the hardcover was entitled *Galilee: A Romance*, but the subtitle seems to have been dropped; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 140.) 20th September 1999.

Blackford, Russell, Van Ikin and Sean McMullen. **Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction**.

"Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, No. 80." Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-25112-6, xiv+247pp, hardcover, no price shown. (History and critical study of sf written in Australia; first edition; a painstaking and commendable work, it begins with considerations of scattered 19th-century texts, then devotes whole chapters to the decades of modern times and several to individual writers such as George Turner, Damien Broderick and Greg Egan; recommended as a valuable addition to the growing number of critical studies of particular national traditions in sf; this has been sent to us by one of the authors [thanks, Sean!], not by the publishers, so we are lacking price and publication date.) No date shown: received in August 1999.

Bradley, Rebecca. **Lady Pain**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-891-4, 336pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1998; third in the trilogy which began with *Lady in Gil* [1996] and *Scian's Lady* [1997].) 26th August 1999.

Brunner, John. **Stand on Zanzibar**. "SF Masterworks, 15." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-836-1, xvi+650pp, B-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1968; a Hugo Award-winner in 1969, and as was stated in *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* [1985], "still one of the mightiest chunks of 'future reality' which any sf writer has given us to chew over"; Brunner died in 1995, so it's high time this, his best-known novel, was reissued.) 26th August 1999.

Calder, Richard. **The Twist**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-03719-6, 282pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel first edition; Calder changes publisher with this book, his sixth novel; it appears to be a sort of science-fiction western!) October 1999.

Chadbourne, Mark. **World's End: Book One of The Age of Misrule**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06680-6, 424pp, hardcover, cover by Jon Sullivan, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author is known for his horror novels, and in fact this one may have elements of horror even if it's presented as fantasy; the

blurb says it "draws on Celtic myth, Arthurian legend and British folklore to tell an epic fantasy of wonder, terror, awe and magic.") 26th August 1999.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Greetings, Carbon-Based Biped!: A Vision of the 20th Century as It Happened**. Edited by Ian T. Macauley. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224697-X, xvii+558pp, hardcover, £19.99. (Non-fiction collection by a major sf writer, first published in the USA [with a differing subtitle], 1999; it contains a great many short pieces, mostly popular-scientific and predictive, but some more "literary," ranging in original date of publication from the 1940s to the present [the earliest piece, "Dunsany, Lord of Fantasy," dates from 1942]; a number of them appear not to have been reprinted before in any of the author's books; reviewed by Tom Arden in *Interzone* 148.) 20th September 1999.

Cordy, Michael. **Crime Zero**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04408-8, 348pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a near-future thriller aimed at the mainstream market, it involves the use of gene therapy to eliminate crime; the author is British [born 1961], and this appears to be his second book; his first, *The Miracle Strain*, has been translated into over 25 languages [so the publishers tell us] and its film rights have been "bought by Disney for \$1.5 million"; we suspect, cynically, that last statement should be interpreted as: "he has signed an option deal which allows for author's payments escalating to \$1.5 million if the film ever actually gets made and released and is deemed by its accountants to enter profit.") 6th September 1999.

Coville, Gary, and Patrick Luciano. **Jack the Ripper: His Life and Crimes in Popular Entertainment**. McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-0616-X, vii+193pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Detailed, illustrated critical study of the uses of Jack the Ripper in fiction, film and on radio and television; first edition; as with the somewhat similar *Rabin Haad* book [see below, under Nollen] this is of small fantasy relevance, but interesting; there's still something disturbing and "improper" about the notion of this real-life serial killer, whose grisly crimes are just over a century old, being regarded as a figure of "popular entertainment" — it can't be denied that he has become one, though.) October 1999.

Dick, Philip K. **Beyond Lies the Wub: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume One**. Introduction by Roger Zelazny. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-879-5, 404pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987; it's a tribute to the late great Phil Dick's durability that this exhaustive posthumous gathering of his stories, mainly from the 1950s, is being issued yet again.) 26th August 1999.

Dick, Philip K. **The Father-Thing: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Three**. Introduction by John Brunner. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-881-7,

## BOOKS RECEIVED



## AUGUST 1999

376pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987.) 26th August 1999.

Dick, Philip K. **Second Variety: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Two**. Introduction by Norman Spinrad. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-880-9, 395pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987.) 26th August 1999.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best Science Fiction: 12th Annual Collection**. Robinson, ISBN 1-84119-053-5, lxiv+671pp, B-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Sixteenth Annual Collection*, 1999; Robinson Publishing's retitling, and especially their renumbering, of this series continues to be a source of irritation and confusion; it contains stories by William Barton, Stephen Baxter, Ted Chiang, Tony Daniel, Greg Egan, Geoffrey A. Landis, Ursula Le Guin, Paul J. McAuley, Ian McDonald, Ian R. MacLeod, Robert Reed, William Browning, Spencer, Bruce Sterling, Michael Swanwick, Howard Waldrop, Cherry Wilder, Liz Williams, Robert Charles Wilson and several others; two of the stories are from *Interzone* — Gwyneth Jones's "La Cenerentola" and Tanith Lee's "Jedella Ghost"; reviewed by Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh in this issue of *Interzone*.) 26th August 1999.

Dunn, J. R. **Full Tide of Night**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79050-5, 312pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1998; by the author best known for his well-reviewed previous novel, *Days of Cain*, this is John Webster's revenge tragedy *The Duchess of*



Malfi re-imagined in outer space; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 140.) August 1999.

Dunsany, Lord. **The King of Elfland's Daughter.** Introduction by Neil Gaiman. Del Rey/Impact, ISBN 0-345-43191-X, xiii+240pp, trade paperback, cover by John W. Waterhouse, \$12. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1924; it's attractively packaged: "Impact" is a new Ballantine/Del Rey imprint name for reissues of "books that made the future"; this famous work by Dunsany [Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, 1878-1957] carries cover commendations by Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp and, good grief, W. B. Yeats.) *Late entry: 1st July publication, received in August 1999.*

Egan, Greg. **Luminous.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-S73-7, 295pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 1998; Egan's second collection, with ten stories: seven from *Interzone* – "Chaff," "Mitochondrial Eve," "Mister Volition," "Transition Dreams," "Silver Fire," "Reasons to be Cheerful" and "Our Lady of Chernobyl" – and three from Asimov's – "Luminous," "Cocoon" and "The Planck Drive"; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 138.) *26th August 1999.*

Egan, Greg. **Quarantine.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-S90-7, 248pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1992; a reissue of the author's debut sf novel; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 69.) *26th August 1999.*

Feist, Raymond E. **Krondor: The Assassins: Book II of The Riftwar Legacy.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224695-3, 352pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £16.99. (Fantasy computer-game novelization, first published in the USA, 1999; an outgrowth of the games *Betrayal at Krondor* and *Return to Krondor*, published by Dynamix, Inc.) *6th September 1999.*

Finch, Sheila. **Tiger in the Sky.** "David Brin's Out of Time." Avon, ISBN 0-380-79971-S, 242pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Bollinger & Cliff Nielsen, \$4.99. (Young-adult sharecrop sf novel, first edition; the second in a time-travel adventure series "created by" David Brin; other books in the series are written by other hands, including those of Nancy Kress and Roger McBride Allen.) *Late entry: 6th July publication, received in August 1999.*

Flammarion, Camille. **Omega: The Last Days of the World.** Introduction by Robert Silverberg. Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, PO Box 880484, Lincoln, NE 68588-0484, USA], ISBN 0-8032-6898-X, xi+287pp, trade paperback, cover by R. VV. Boeche, £9.95. (Sf novel, first published in France as *La Fin du Monde*, 1893; a facsimile of the first English-language edition [New York: Cosmopolitan, 1894], complete with original illustrations by various hands; the translator is not named; this is the American edition of 1999 with a new Silverberg intro-

duction and with a UK price and publication date added; distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 41 Bayston Rd., London N16 7LU; Camille Flammarion [1842-1925] was a noted French astronomer and popular-science writer who wrote a fair amount of sf; his fiction, with its visionary far-future sweep [and, it has to be said, lack of characterization and dramatization], has been compared to that of the later British writer Olaf Stapledon; Flammarion's works have been very hard to obtain in English in recent decades, so we are pleased to receive this one; as we said on receipt of their last book, these handsomely-produced Bison Books reprints of old sf [so far they have released titles by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack London and Jules Verne] are building up into a useful series, well worth looking out for.) *Late entry: June publication, received in August 1999.*

Galbraith, Lettice. **The Blue Room and Other Ghost Stories.** "Richard Dalby's Mistresses of the Macabre, Volume One." Edited by Richard Dalby. Sarob Press ["Brynderwen," 41 Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU], ISBN 1-902309-05-7, xii+112pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Lowe, £20. (Horror collection, first edition; limited to 250 numbered copies; seven long-lost stories by a late-Victorian author; disinterred by the indefatigable Mr Dalby; six of the stories come from the rare Ward Lock paperback collection *New Ghost Stories* [1893]; the seventh, which is the title story, "The Blue Room," is reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine*, October 1897; like

other Sarob Press publications, this nicely-produced little volume is recommended to those of an antiquarian bent.) *No date shown: received in August 1999.*

Green, Sharon. **Prophecy: Book Five of The Blending.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78811-X, 405pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tom Canty, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Convergence* [1996], *Competitions* [1997], *Challenges* [1998] and *Betrays* [1999].) *Late entry: 6th July publication, received in August 1999.*

Gross, Philip. **Facetaker.** "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-01232-S, 181pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) *20th August 1999.*

Haining, Peter. **The Nine Lives of Doctor Who.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-2243-6, 192pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Yet another copiously-illustrated celebratory history of the BBC kids'-sf TV series; first edition; "at its peak," claims Haining, "it attracted over a hundred million viewers around the globe" – and the nostalgia market associated with it seems to be bottomless in its hunger for more trivia.) *30th September 1999.*

Haining, Peter, ed. **Great Irish Tales of Fantasy.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63514-X, 309pp, C-format paperback, cover by Charles Bentley, £8.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in 1994 as *Great Irish Tales of the Unimaginable* [a silly-sounding title which

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they've done well to dispose of]; it contains all-reprint stories by Brian Cleeve, Lord Dunsany, Lady Gregory, James Joyce [a brief extract from *Ulysses*], Mary Lavin, Dorothy Macardle, Eimar O'Duffy, Julia O'Faolain, Standish James O'Grady, James Stephens, Mervyn Wall, Maurice Walsh, T. H. White, W. B. Yeats and many more; a rich tradition.) 16th September 1999.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Great Irish Tales of Horror: A Treasury of Fear.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63515-8, 301pp, C-format paperback, £8.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1995; it contains all-reprint stories by Elizabeth Bowen, Catherine Brophy, Brian Cleeve, Lafcadio Hearn [his name here rendered as "Patrick Lafcadio Hearn" to make him sound more Irish], Neil Jordan, Sheridan Le Fanu, Shane Leslie, Dorothy Macardle, Charles Robert Maturin, Brian Moore, Fitz-James O'Brien, Vincent O'Sullivan, George Bernard Shaw, Bram Stoker, L. A. G. Strong, J. M. Synge, William Trevor and many more.) 16th September 1999.

Jordan, Robert. **The Path of Daggers: Book Eight of The Wheel of Time.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-569-X, xi+655pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK and USA [simultaneously], 1998; a genuine number-one bestseller in hardcover; it prompted another chorus of "Robert *Who?*" from mainstream commentators when it came out last year; "Robert Jordan" is a pseudonym for James Rigney, Jr.) 2nd September 1999.

Jude, Dick. **Fantasy Art of the New Millennium: The Best in Fantasy and SF Art Worldwide.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-413374-9, 144pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Stone, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio, first edition; superbly illustrated throughout, it contains a fairly substantial text by Dick Jude, who is best-known as a bookseller [manager of Forbidden Planet, London], incorporating interviews with artists Jim Burns, Fred Gambino, John Howe, Alan Lee, Dave McKean, Don Maitz, Chris Moore and others; recommended.) 6th September 1999.

Le Guin, Ursula. **The Dispossessed.** "SF Masterworks, 16." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-882-S, 319pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1974; a Hugo and Nebula Award-winner in 1975.) 26th August 1999.

Leiber, Fritz. **Lean Times in Lankhmar.** Introduction by Raymond E. Feist. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-816-7, viii+407pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in the USA, 1996; originally published by White Wolf in the USA, this is the second in an attractive four-volume repackaging of all the late Fritz Leiber's "Fafhrd and Gray Mouser" stories; the present one comprises the books previously published as *Swords in the Mist* and *Swords Against Wizardry* [both 1968]; recommended.) 26th August 1999.

Leith, Valery. **The Company of Glass: Evening, Book One.** Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-547-8, x+397pp, C-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "Valery Leith," states the back cover, "is the pseudonym of a critically acclaimed young science fiction writer"; it is rumoured to be the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning, American-born-but-British-resident Tricia Sullivan.) 26th August 1999.

McAuley, Paul J. **Ancients of Days: The Second Book of Confluence.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97516-S, 386pp, hardcover, cover by Gregory Bridges, \$16. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1998; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 136; this is one of Avon's small-format, commendably cheap hardcovers – an attractive hardcover at a trade-paperback price.) Late entry: 6th July publication, received in August 1999.

McHugh, Maureen F. **China Mountain Zhang.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-862-1, 313pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; its author's first book, and winner of the James Tiptree Memorial Award in 1993; third Orbit printing; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 64.) 2nd September 1999.

Moon, Elizabeth. **Winning Colours: Book Three of The Serrano Legacy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-880-X, 409pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; space opera lives!) 2nd September 1999.

Nollen, Scott Allen. **Robin Hood: A Cinematic History of the English Outlaw and His Scottish Counterparts.** McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-0643-7, ix+259pp, hardcover, \$36.50. (Detailed, illustrated critical study of the uses of Robin Hood [and his Scottish surrogates such as William Wallace and Rob Roy] in the cinema and on television; first edition; this is of small fantasy relevance, but nevertheless interesting; the author regards the 1938 Warner Brothers Errol Flynn movie as the masterpiece of this particular canon [quite rightly], and the 1991 Kevin Costner film as the nadir [agreed!]; it's a generally well-informed study, although it's a pity the author seems to be barely acquainted with the most fantastic modern treatment of Robin, namely the British TV series *Robin of Sherwood* [1984-1986] starring Michael Praed, written by Richard Carpenter [he gives it a passing mention at the bottom of page 169].) October 1999.

Palmer, Jane. **The Drune.** Swift Publishers [PO Box 1436, Sheffield S17 3XP], ISBN 1-874082-27-8, 212pp, B-format paperback, cover by Dandi Palmer, £5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; the author's fourth novel [she used to be published by Women's Press], following *The Planet Dweller*, *Moving Moosevan* and *The Watcher*.) August 1999.

Pelan, John, ed. **The Last Continent: New Tales of Zothique.** Introduction by Donald

Sidney-Fryer. ShadowLands Press [Bereshith Publishing, PO Box 2366, Centreville, VA 20122-2366], ISBN 0-9665662-4-6, hardcover, cover by Ron Alexander, 440pp, \$60. (Horror/fantasy shared-world anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed, slipcased, "deluxe" edition priced at \$100 [not seen]; it consists of all-new stories set in the far-future land of "Zothique" invented by the American writer Clark Ashton Smith [1893-1961] – by Mark Chadbourn, Gerard Houarner, Rhys Hughes, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, David B. Silva, Brian Stableford, Lucy Taylor, Don Webb, t. Winter-Damon, Gene Wolfe and others.) August 1999.

Pierce, Tamora. **The Fire in the Forging: Circle of Magic, 3.** Scholastic Press, 0-439-0110S-1, 182pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) 20th August 1999.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **The Martians.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-22S932-X, 400pp, C-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £10.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1999; it consists of several new novellas and short stories, all set on the Red Planet, plus various background fillers and unpublished out-takes [including poems] from the author's now-classic Mars trilogy, *Red Mars* [1992], *Green Mars* [1993] and *Blue Mars* [1995]; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 144.) 6th September 1999.

Sherman, Josepha, and Susan Shwartz. **Vulcan's Heart.** "Star Trek." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-01544-3, 378pp, hardcover, cover by Dru Blair, £12.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; this is the American first edition of July 1999 with a British price added.) August 1999.

Silverberg, Robert. **Lord Prestimion.** "A magnificent epic in the Majipoor Cycle." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-6S1103-1, 434pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1998; the sixth "Majipoor" book; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 143.) 20th September 1999.

Silverberg, Robert. **Lord Valentine's Castle.** "The first book in the legendary Majipoor Cycle." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648377-1, 506pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1980; first Voyager printing [it was previously a Pan paperback in the UK]; as we said a couple of years ago, it was probably Silverberg who began the trend for serious sf writers to attempt to revitalize their sales by writing fantasy-lookalike trilogies, almost always in planetary-romance form; British writers who have followed suit include Brian Aldiss ["*Helliconia*"], Ian Watson ["*Book of the River*"], the late Bob Shaw ["*Ragged Astronauts*"], Brian Stableford ["*Genesys*"] and, most recently, Paul J. McAuley ["*Confluence*"].) 20th September 1999.

Smith, Elton E., and Robert Haas, eds. **The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature.** Scarecrow Press [4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706, USA], ISBN 0-8108-3412-X, xiv+139pp, hardcover, \$35. (Anthology of essays on Victorian supernatural fiction, first edition; it includes work on Dickens, Kenneth Grahame, Kipling, Le Fanu, Henry James, Mary Shelley, Stevenson, Tennyson and Oscar Wilde [the term "Victorian" has obviously been stretched to cover the period 1818-1908, from *Frankenstein* to *The Wind in the Willows*], and the critics include Kath Filmer, Roger C. Schlobin, Elaine Showalter and Harry Stone, among others; it's a slim but high-quality critical collection.) *Lote entry: June publication, received in August 1999.*

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Sean Wallace. **Eric Frank Russell: Our Sentinel in Space—A Working Bibliography.** 3rd edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader, Volume 24." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-SS-6, ix+97pp, small-press paperback, £5. (Sf author bibliography; the first and second editions appeared in 1986 and 1988; this new version is re-set in handy AS paperback form, with a spine; recommended.) *August 1999.*

Sullivan, Tricia. **Dreaming in Smoke.** Millennium, ISBN 0-75281-682-9, 290pp, A-format paperback, cover by Holly Warburton, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1998; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, 1999; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 137.) *26th August 1999.*

Taylor, Mary P., ed. **Adventures in Time and Space.** "Star Trek." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-03415-4, xvi+S92pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff anthology, first published in the USA, 1999; this is the American first edition of August 1999 with a British price added; it's a giant-sized sampler of Trek fiction, consisting of "the greatest moments from the most exciting *Star Trek* books ever published"; it also includes a detailed timeline for the novels; the editor states in her introduction: "At

the time of this writing, Pocket has published more than 250 original *Star Trek*, *TNG*, *DS9* and *Voyager* series novels, novelizations, and crossover series novels"; she has read them all to arrive at this anthology; by the way, the title, *Adventures in Time and Space*, is the same as that borne by one of the very first big science-fiction anthologies [edited by Raymond J. Healy and J. Francis McComas, Random House, 1946] — we wonder if Mary P. Taylor was conscious of this?) *September 1999.*

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Gate to Women's Country.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648270-8, 315pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 30.) *20th September 1999.*

Turtledove, Harry. **The Great War: Walk in Hell.** "An alternate history of the War to End All Wars." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40561-7, 484pp, hardcover, cover by George Pratt, \$25.95. (Alternate-history sf novel, first edition; sequel to *The Great War: American Front* [1998] in an ongoing tetralogy about a First World War which went differently from the one familiar in our timeline; Turtledove continues to bewilder us with his prolificacy: this book is not to be confused with his other

recent tomes, *Colonization: Second Contact* [Del Rey, February 1999], *Into the Darkness* [Tor, April 1999] and *Household Gods* [with Judith Tarr; Tor, September 1999]; as we said on the appearance of *Into the Darkness*, "does he really need to have three series on the go at the same time, and do all his books have to be 500 pages-plus?"; to which we might add, "and do they have to come out so close together?") *2nd August 1999.*

Vallejo, Boris. **Dreams: The Art of Boris Vallejo.** Text by Nigel Suckling. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-715-4, 128pp, hardcover, cover by Vallejo, £20. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio; first edition; a new gathering — in plushly-printed, full-colour, large format — of book covers and other artwork by the popular Peruvian-born American artist who famously specializes in spectacularly muscular men and buxom women.) *7th October 1999.*

Wells, Martha. **The Death of the Necromancer.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78814-4, 513pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jean Pierre Targete, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1998; it seems to be an example of what *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* calls "gaslight romance.") *Lote entry: 6th July publication, received in August 1999.*

White, James. **Double Contact: A Sector General Novel.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87041-8, 300pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; alas, the author's final novel, as he died suddenly [August 1999] while this book was in production; with both Bob Shaw and James White gone, Northern Ireland has lost its two leading lights in science fiction.) *October 1999.*

Wilhelm, Kate. **The Casebook of Constance and Charlie, Volume 1.** St Martin's Minotaur, ISBN 0-312-24501-7, 614pp, trade paperback, \$18.95. (Crime-fiction omnibus, with light sf/fantasy elements, first edition; proof copy received; it contains the first three novels in Wilhelm's "Constance Leidl and Charlie Meiklejohn" series — *The Homlet Trap* [1987], *Smart House* [1989] and *Seven Kinds of Death* [1992].) *December 1999.*

Williams, Tad. **Mountain of Black Glass: Otherland, Volume Three.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-748-X, xxvii+689pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1999; its predecessor was reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 139.) *23rd September 1999.*



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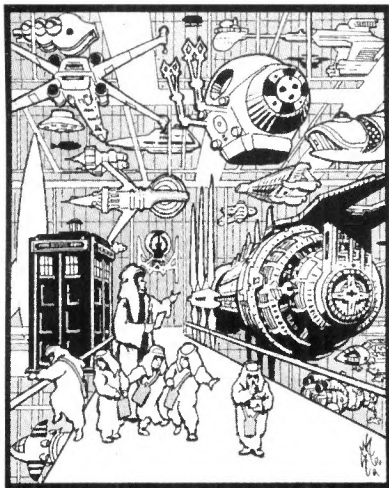
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*Interzone's* 150th issue! We're putting together an all-star line-up which should include splendid new work by Richard Calder, James Lovegrove, Ian Watson and others. And the following month, for the New Year (and New Millennium?), we have a special issue to mark the 60th birthday of Michael Moorcock. Don't miss either: look out for the December 1999 issue (#150), on sale in November, and the January 2000 issue, (#151), on sale in December.



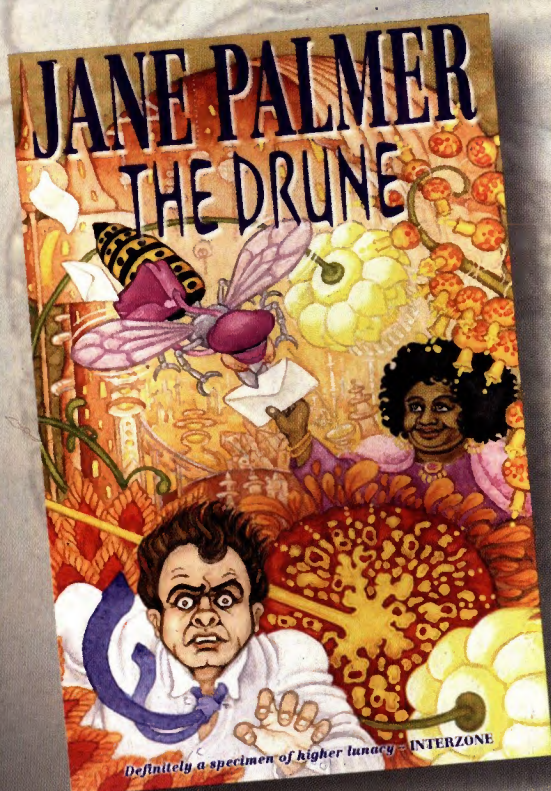


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